

S E R M O N S

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

BY

K
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IN TWO VOLUMES.

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1776

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S E R M O N I.

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CON-

S E R M O N I.

MATTHEW V. 6.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and
thirst after Righteousness, for they
shall be filled.*

IN these words we have two things
distinctly proposed to our confide-
ration:

First, A virtue recommended, *Blessed
are they who hunger and thirst after
Righteousness.*

Secondly, The particular felicity
promised to those who practise this
virtue, *for they shall be filled.*

Neither of them is without its difficulty ; and because, I apprehend, this text is not rightly understood, neither by the generality of readers, nor interpreters, I propose in the present discourse to explain what seems to me to be its true sense and meaning.

To begin with the virtue recommended: the word *Righteousness* is used in several senses in the New Testament, which has occasioned a variety of interpretations concerning the meaning of it in this place. I shall consider them distinctly, that we may the better understand the meaning of the text.

First, then, Righteousness is sometimes used in a borrowed law sense, not for real, but imputed Righteousness;

ness; when a man is cleared in judgement, whether by standing upon his justification, or by pleading his pardon. This last is the righteousness of faith in Christ, by which we are justified before God; and though it is not used in this sense in the gospels, nor any where else in the New Testament, except in *St. Paul's* epistles; yet, because this is a very desirable thing, and therefore a proper object for our spiritual hunger and thirst, it has been pitched upon as the sense, by sundry well-meaning interpreters. But for two or three reasons, I think it cannot be the Righteousness here meant.

First, we may observe, that when Righteousness is to be understood in this borrowed law sense, the

apostle generally adds some words for the explication of it, calling it, the Righteousness of faith; or, the Righteousness of God; or, Righteousness imputed; but uses not the word alone, without some addition, or previous, or concomitant description, from which we may know that it is to be determined to that sense.

2dly. It is not very probable that, before the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ was as yet preached or taught, our Saviour would have used the word Righteousness in this borrowed sense, as knowing it must needs, at that time, be altogether unintelligible to his hearers.

3dly. I think it will appear plain to any attentive reader, that it is not the doctrine

doctrine of justification, but the doctrine of sanctification, or new life, which our Lord in this chapter is endeavouring to inculcate upon his disciples and auditory, as a necessary pre-requisite, or disposition for the evangelical state; and, therefore, it seems no way agreeable to the scope of the place, to recommend as yet the doctrine of Christ's imputed Righteousness.

The word Righteousness then I think, must be taken here in a moral sense; but even thus, it is used wider or narrower in the holy scriptures. Sometimes by Righteousness is meant that universal Righteousness, consisting in a sincere endeavour to comply with the whole duty of man; and sometimes the particular virtue of

justice, which gives every man his due. Now, it is the first of these which interpreters most commonly take to be meant in this place; and, according to them, the meaning of the words, *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after Righteousness, for they shall be filled*, is, as if our Lord had said, Blessed are they who have an earnest desire after holiness, for they shall not miss of their aim, but shall certainly attain that for which they so earnestly long.

But, though this is a true doctrine, and a very pious sense, yet, when I consider the scope of the place and the context, I must be of opinion against the greater number of interpreters, that by justice, or Righteousness here, is meant the particular virtue of justice
or

or honesty; and that by being filled or satisfied, is meant their having enough, or their enjoying a good competency of the blessings of this world; or, in short, that their honesty shall not impoverish them, but that it shall prove the best way to increase and preserve even their temporal interests. My reasons for this interpretation are these three:

1st. All the other beatitudes are particular virtues; and therefore it is most probable that this word, *Righteousness*, in the text, which may very properly be rendered justice, is also a particular virtue.

2dly. This better answers our Saviour's scope and intent, which was, to correct the bad dispositions of mind his hearers were under with relation

to the evangelical state, Now, one notorious bad disposition of mind they indulged, was, that they expected, by the way of fighting and conquest, to invade other men's possessions. The covetousness of this temper our Saviour had corrected in another beatitude, where he recommends poverty of spirit, and the injustice of it he reprehends in the present one.

3dly. Here is a great catalogue of christian virtues enumerated in these eight beatitudes; now, how improbable is it that one of the eight should comprehend the whole? Besides, let it be tried in other places of the New Testament, where there is any enumeration of particular virtues, and it will be found, that wherever the word, here rendered Righteousness, is brought

S E R M O N I.

brought in, it is by common consent of interpreters understood to be the particular virtue of justice. I shall mention two of these catalogues, besides this of my text, where this virtue of justice, or Righteousness, makes a part; and in both these it is the particular virtue of justice that is meant and recommended. The first is in the sixth chapter of the first epistle to *Timothy*. *But thou, O man of God, flee these things,* (he had been speaking of the sins of covetousness); and then he adds, *and follow after Righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.* Where we see he recommends to Timothy six virtues, (as opposite to covetousness) and Righteousness, that is, justice, at the head of them. The second is in 2 Tim. chap. ii. where dissuading from youthful lusts; *Flee, also,*
youthful

youthful lusts, says he, but follow Righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

—Now is there not in these eight beatitudes as great a catalogue of virtues as is enumerated in any of the other passages, of which catalogue this virtue is but one? In the other passages, it is understood in the sense of the particular virtue of justice, and why not in this for the same reasons? I conclude then, that when our Saviour saith here, *Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after Righteousness, or justice,* the sense is, as if he had said, “Ye imagine the followers of the Messiah shall conquer great cities and countries; that by no other right or title, besides that of the sword, they shall invade the wealth and possessions of other men; and ye are pushed on with as eager

eager desires after these things, as an hungry man hath after meat, or a thirsty man after drink: but ye are under a great mistake, the kingdom of the Messiah abhors every thing that is wrongful or unjust; and, therefore, if ye design to be good subjects of that kingdom, instead of longing after your neighbour's goods and possessions, desire above all things honest hearts, free from all sinister bias and affection; desire, in short, that ye may have both the judgment to know, and the inclination to do right and justice to all mankind."

The duty then here recommended, I take to be a great love of justice. I purposely chuse to call it by the name of justice; For, though the word Righteousness sometimes may comprehend

prehend all that is any way due to our neighbour, even relief in his wants, as well as his legal, just demands ; yet, here I judge it must be interpreted in a more limited sense, only for the duty of justice ; and that, because mercy, the other great branch of our duty to our neighbour, has a distinct consideration in the very next beatitude. I call it a great love of justice, because it is here resembled to those most quick and pungent desires of hunger and thirst, which have a vehement tendency to satisfaction.

But that I may afford this virtue a clearer consideration, I shall as distinctly, but as briefly as such an ample subject will admit, consider both the object, justice, and the act of hungering and thirsting after it.

As

As to the object, justice, or Righteousness, it is of a very large extent, as reaching to all those virtues by which our neighbour has any right to claim from us, or not to be injured by us.

This, in some respects, will reach farther than even the large duties of the whole second table of the law; for, by giving a bad example in transgressing the duties of the first table of the law, which relate to our duty to God, we may be guilty of a great piece of injustice to our neighbour, in seducing him from his duty, and so ruining his soul to all eternity. The same may be said of our duty to ourselves; for, though every transgression of that duty is not directly an injustice to our neighbour, yet if by so doing, we either give our neighbour
a bad

a bad example, or by disordering ourselves, we unfit and indispose ourselves for discharging our duty to our neighbour, we become guilty of injustice towards him.

But, more particularly, the duty of justice relates to those large duties of the second table of the law, wherein we stand bound to our neighbour in several capacities, whether we come to the knowledge of them by the light and law of nature, or by the law of Moses, with the explication of the prophets in the Old Testament, or by the more perfect laws of Christ, and the explications of the apostles in the New ; or even by the laws and constitutions of kingdoms and commonwealths, and other legal societies and authority, whether civil or ecclesiastical :

fiastical: for all these, in so far as they are not contrary to the laws of God, are approved, and commanded to be observed by the christian religion; as St. Peter observes, *Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake.* Further still, all good, laudable, and friendly customs and practices, are, in general, recommended. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, (i. e. decent or honourable) whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, (or friendly) whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things.* So that there is nothing due to our neighbour, either by the law of nature, or by the positive laws of God, or by the laws of the land, or by any friendly laudable

• dable custom or practice, but this virtue of justice, or Righteousness, as explained by the christian religion, requires it to be paid him : for it would not have us fall short in any thing, which by any of these titles is justly our neighbour's due. *Render therefore to all their dues ; tribute to whom tribute is due, custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another ; for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*

I should much exceed the usual limits of a discourse, if I proceeded to describe to you all the particular branches of this duty of justice, as it relates to the soul and body, the goods, and good name of our neighbour ; nay, the time would fail me if I did but de-
scribe

scribe what is due to all men in general, without entering into that great body of duty resulting from the particular relations of magistrates and subjects, husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and servants, pastors and people, buyers and sellers, those who commit a trust and those who receive it, and all the other numerous relations of life. I shall, therefore, only say, in general, that the christian religion is so far from discouraging, or even from neglecting and overlooking these matters of morality and common justice and honesty, that it carefully recommends them in the amplest manner; that is, not only as the best legislators, and best magistrates, and best neighbours would require, but as we ourselves would wish to be dealt by in the like circumstances,

stances, which will certainly take in the utmost that not only law and strict justice, but what the largest equity and good conscience would dictate to be due to our neighbour.

So much for justice, or Righteousness, which is the object of this duty of my text. I proceed next to consider the act of hungering and thirsting. By this I understand a high degree of love and desire, as if he had said, Blessed are they that have a prevalent love and desire after justice or honesty, in all actions, dealings, judgments, and transactions whatsoever. But, perhaps, this may be thought an unsuitable expression, if applied to this particular virtue; justice and honesty in our actions not being a virtue so hard to learn, that we need to have
such

such longing desires after it. For answering this doubt, and to clear the propriety of the phrase in the text, I will propose the following considerations.

Though justice or honesty seems an easy virtue, and one of the things which are in our own power, and therefore not so properly the object of our earnest desires; yet there are really considerable difficulties in it, for the overcoming of which it may be very reasonable to wish earnestly.

1st. It is often difficult to discern on which side truth and justice lie. We want a great deal of knowledge and consideration, and freedom from prejudice and partiality to find it out, and therefore it may properly be the object of our desire.

2dly. Even when we have knowledge and consideration enough to discern truth from falsehood, and right from wrong, we are often so insensibly carried by the strong biaſſes of worldly interest, ſelf-love, and urgent neceſſity, that we cannot eaſily incline our wills to follow the rectitude of our judgments. In that caſe, with the hardened Jews, having eyes we ſee not, and having ears we hear not, and having hearts we underſtand not; and if there be not then a ſuperior inclination towards juſtice, to conquer all thoſe prejudices and biaſſes of ſelf-love and worldly intereſt, our underſtandings, like a bribed judge, will be apt to give ſentence on the wrong ſide. Therefore, we have great reaſon to wiſh for this ſtrong propenſity and ſuperior inclination to juſtice, which, like hunger and
thiſt,

thirst, may give us no rest till it be satisfied.

3dly. Consider that if it is not only our own justice we are to desire, but a general prevalency of justice and righteousness in the world, this is most properly a thing to be longed for, as being exceedingly wanted in many Cases, and not easily in the power of any man to compass; so that the expression of hungering and thirsting after justice is still very proper. Upon all these accounts we have reason to believe, that this prevailing love and regard to justice, both in ourselves and others, is the virtue to which we are here exhorted.

The meaning of the text being thus explained, I shall only add a short exhortation to three sorts of persons, for

the more effectual securing the duty of justice or honesty which I have been describing.

My first advice is, to those who neglect the study of justice, as if it was a thing too low for the high dispensation of the gospel, a mere matter of form, or a thing that is to be made subservient to our worldly interests: for if we had not such a mean opinion of it, how is it possible that it should be governed so much by party and interest, and selfish and partial considerations, as it is in the world? Surely we fancy justice to be nothing antecedently to our opinion; or if we have any notions of it, they are quickly drowned in the more prevalent considerations of party or interest, or advantages for ourselves, our friends, and our families. But be assured, no
man

man deserves the name of a christian, who cannot be depended upon for the truth of his words; nor for the fidelity of his oaths and promises; nor for the fairness of his transactions; nor for the honesty of his actions; nor for the faithful discharge of a trust. He that will dissemble, oppress, exact, and contrive snares to entrap his honest neighbour for a little gain, how will he ever come up to the higher precept of doing by others, as we would be done by ourselves?

My second advice shall be to them, who are so far convinced of the duty of justice and honesty, that they are resolved to set about it; and to them I must recommend the practice of several other christian virtues, without which it will be very hard, if not impossible,

possible, to preserve their honesty. I shall but just name the chief of those that are necessary to this end, because I have not time to insist upon them.

1st, If ye intend to be just and honest, study the fear of God; for if we be honest, only out of regard to human laws, or reputation, this is no honesty at all, but the fear of men and self-love; and besides, without the fear of God, we shall find abundance of opportunities for dishonesty, which either human laws have not provided against, or human care and authority cannot, or is not willing to discover,

2dly. If we would be honest, it is necessary to avoid covetousness and ambition; and, as we are often advised by our religion, not to aim at great things

things in the world, but having food and raiment, or the necessaries of life, let us be therewith content, that so we may be under no temptation from a boundless love of wealth or greatness, to do unjust or dishonest things: not, but that if God adds wealth to our honest endeavours, we are thankfully to accept it, and to make good use of it, but never to covet it, or to be biaſſed by it, from the straight rule of honesty.

3dly. He that would be just and honest, should be diligent in the business of his lawful calling; for idleness brings want, and want is a great temptation to injustice and dishonesty.

4thly. Beware of litigiousness, which is a great enemy to justice and honesty,

nefty, both as it stimulates us to take all advantages of our neighbour, and as it brings ourselves to poverty, and so tempts to dishonesty.

The last advice I have to offer on this subject, is, to them who are conscious to themselves of having dealt unjustly or dishonestly by their neighbour in any matter; and it is, in short, that, in the first place, they repent of the sin before God; and in the next place, that they make reparation and restitution to their neighbour to the utmost of their power. We ought to have such a prevalent propensity to justice, expressed here by hungering and thirsting after it, that no consideration, either of shame, or poverty, or interest, should keep us from doing right to those we have injured;

jured; for, to do to others that which we wish others should do to us, in the same circumstances, is the sum and substance of that Righteousness here recommended: a rule of such excellence and extent, that we have our Saviour's authority for declaring it to be the essence of all that the law and the prophets contain; and we may add also of the moral precepts of the gospel, by which we shall be hereafter tried at the judgment seat of Christ, according to the works done in the body, whether they have been good, or whether they have been evil.

...the will of the Father, who is
...and substance of the Father,
...is here recommended; a true
...this character of the Father,
...has our Father, who is the
...character of the Father of all
...the Father and the Son, who is
...we may and do of the Father,
...of the Father, by which we shall
...Father and at the same time
...Christ, according to the words of
...in the Father, who is the Father
...good, or rather, who is the Father
...and the Father, who is the Father
...we may and do of the Father,
...in the Father, who is the Father
...to, according to the words of the
...in the Father, who is the Father
...in the Father, who is the Father

S E R M O N II.

MATTHEW v. 6.

*Blessed are they which do hunger and
thirst after Righteousness, for they
shall be filled.*

IN a former discourse from the first part of this text, I explained what was meant by hungering and thirsting after Righteousness; my design is, at present, from the second part of it, to consider the promise annexed to this duty, for they shall be filled, or satisfied.

The

The duty of hungering and thirsting after Righteousness, I interpreted to be a great love of justice, in opposition to that wrong notion our Saviour's disciples, and the multitude, had of the Messiah's kingdom, as if his followers were by the right of conquest, and the power of the sword, to enter upon the wealth and possessions of other men. In opposition to this false notion, our Saviour here teaches, that a love of justice and honesty is a principal qualification for the kingdom of the Messiah; and, for their encouragement, he assures them, they need not fear that their justice and honesty should deprive them of the means of carrying on the great designs of that kingdom; for, that God would so bless their just and honest endeavours, that they should be fully satisfied as
to

to all that was necessary and convenient for them.

The point of doctrine, then, here taught in this promise before us, and which I intend as the subject of the following discourse, is, “That
“men of honest principles, and true
“and just in their dealings, need not
“fear that they shall be reduced to
“want by their honesty, for, that
“God will take care, in his good providence, that they shall be supplied
“to their content and satisfaction.” This is a very comfortable promise, and, were it duly minded and believed, would be a great inducement to truth and fidelity in all our words, and to uprightness in all our actions.

In treating this subject, I shall confine

fine myself to these two heads of discourse.

First. By way of explication, I will endeavour to describe, what sort of supply it is, which is promised here to just and honest men, under these words, *for they shall be filled.*

Secondly. I will endeavour from scripture and reason, to prove, that this promise shall be made good.

First, then, As to the supply here promised to just and honest men, that they shall be filled, or satisfied, we are not to believe that by this promise is meant superfluous wealth; for the filling, or satisfying, mentioned in the text, has relation to men's hunger, that is, to their real wants and necessities,

ties, not their imaginary ones. No; we are not to conceive, that, in order to the fulfilling the promise in the text, we are to be supplied with superfluity, superfluous wealth not being necessary towards the true happiness of life.—What is it, then, that is promised to the sincere lovers of justice and honesty, under these words, “they shall be filled, or satisfied?” I answer, chiefly these three things, which are all very valuable blessings :

1st. A competency, or sufficiency of outward conveniences.

2dly. A contentment, or satisfaction of mind with our lot and portion, be it what it will.

3dly. An heart to use and enjoy the blessings which God bestows upon us,

for the several uses and occasions of life. These three, and no more, I take to be necessary towards the satisfaction promised in the text ; they deserve a more particular consideration.

The first thing which I apprehend to be promised in these words, *for they shall be filled*, is a competency, that is, such a portion of the good things of this life as God knows to be requisite for every one's occasions and circumstances. This is not alike in all ; for as there are several ranks, orders, and degrees among men, some superiors, others inferiors ; some to command, some to obey ; some requiring more, some less, towards the honest and decent discharge of their several functions ; it is not to be understood by this competency of worldly good things
promised

promised to men of probity and honesty, that God will raise them all to the highest rank of mankind, and bless them with such affluence and abundance, as is requisite for persons in those highest stations, though it is often seen that honesty and diligence promote men to stations of the first rank. *Seest thou a man diligent in his business, he shall stand before kings, he shall not stand before mean men,* saith Solomon. But this is not the thing here promised; it is only promised that they shall be filled, which has reference to their capacity and circumstances. When a man in a lower sphere has enough to supply his fewer wants, he is as truly filled and satisfied as a prince or great man, with a thousand times his income, who has likewise usually a thousand

times more occasion for such an income.

The second thing promised in these words, *for they shall be filled*, or satisfied, is a contentment or satisfaction of mind with their circumstances; for, without this, no outward competency whatsoever can be said to fill, or satisfy the mind. Now, this is a blessing no way confined to the more affluent and plentiful fortunes, but diffused through all; nay, more frequently to be found in cottages than in palaces. A great blessing doubtless it is, when God gives a man grace to suit his mind to his fortune, and contentedly to acquiesce in his holy will and pleasure, contrary to the temper of the covetous and ambitious, who are never easy under

der their present circumstances, but are always aiming at further and higher measures of wealth and greatness.

A third thing necessary for completing this promise in the text, is, a heart to use and enjoy the blessings God bestows upon us, for the several uses and occasions of life; since, without this, a competency of outward good things would be no blessing, and of no use. It would be only as if, under the notion of presenting me with a sum of money, the donor should count out, indeed, the money into bags, and should lock them up in my chest, but withal should put the key in his own pocket, and tell me that I should have no access to it, but by his leave; so that without this heart to use our competency, we should want what we

died

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have,

have, as well as what we have not, consequently could never have our wants supplied, or our desires filled or satisfied, which is the promise in the text.

So much for the first thing I proposed to consider, namely, what sort of supply it is which is here promised to just and honest men.

2dly. I proceed next to prove, from scripture and reason, that this promise of a competency shall be made good to the just, honest man.

To begin with the text: It is true there are a great many interpreters who expound this filling, or satisfying, to relate to spiritual and eternal blessings; but there is great reason
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both from the meaning of the original Greek, (which signifies to feed to a satisfaction of hunger), from the nature of this promise, so particularly adapted to the duty of justice to which it is annexed, to believe that it is a competency of outward blessings which is here promised.

Upon occasion of this observation, I am tempted to digress a little, and to say something in general of the promises annexed to the several duties in these *beatitudes*. It has been received as a current notion, that all those promises are to be resolved into one; that they are nothing else but eternal life, under different notions and acceptations; whereas, perhaps, to any one that will enquire more diligently into the nature of them, they will all ap-

pear as distinct as the duties to which they are annexed, and all of them something immediately resulting from the nature of that particular duty to which they are joined. Thus, in the first beatitude, it is foretold and promised, that the Messiah's kingdom, that is, the church of Christ, should consist of men, whose hearts and affections were not set on the world; which is a very particular thing; the same that St. Paul observes in the following words: *For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called.* And St. James says, *Hath not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom?* In the promise annexed to the second beatitude, the inward comforts which follow a state of penitence,

nitence, are pointed out. In the third beatitude, the quiet and peaceable enjoyment of what they have, is promised to the meek. In the fourth beatitude, which is that of our text, a competency is promised to honesty. In the fifth, mercy, both from God and man, is promised to the merciful. In the sixth, acquaintance with God and divine things, is promised to the pure in heart. In the seventh, the honour of being owned as the Children of God, is annexed to the peacemakers. And in the last, proportionate degrees of happiness in heaven are promised to them who suffer for Christ, or their duty here upon earth. I have not time to prove particularly the truth of this observation; only, in general, it is much more probable, that our Saviour, who uses

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not to be guilty of tautologies, would not have eight times together repeated the same thing; besides, the expressions are all different, according to the different relation they have to the duties enjoined: particularly in this promise here, our Saviour seems to obviate an objection which they tacitly harboured in their breasts; as if, being but poor themselves, they were unable to sustain the charge and expence of founding the Messiah's kingdom, without invading the estates of other men. To prevent this conceit, our Saviour acquaints them, that if they studied justice and honesty, they should not need to fear want; for that God would supply them with whatever was necessary, or convenient for them.

Now, to shew you that this doctrine is countenanced both by scripture and reason,

reason, I shall briefly produce an argument from both ; and first from scripture. The Old Testament abounds in promises of this kind, which are all very applicable to the gospel times, especially when the church is not under persecution, but has *kings for her nursing fathers, and queens for her nursing mothers*. I shall quote a few of the plainest to this purpose. The Psalmist says, *Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed*. What is this but the same in my text, *they shall be filled*? So in the 25th verse of the same Psalm. *I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread*. Solomon says, *The righteous eateth to the satisfying of his soul, but the belly of the wicked shall want*. Many
such

such observations doth Solomon make in that book. *The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked: but he blesteth the habitation of the just. The Lord will not suffer the soul of the righteous to famish; but he casteth away the substance of the wicked. Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished, but he that gathereth by labour shall increase.* Wealth gotten by vanity, that is, by fraud and dishonest courses, which is set in opposition to gathering by honest labour and industry. I shall quote but one passage more out of the Old Testament, it is in the thirty-third chap. of Isaiah. *He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gains of oppression, and shaketh his hands from holding of bribes, that stoppeth his ears from bearing of blood, and shutteth his eyes*

eyes from seeing evil, he shall dwell on high: his place of defence shall be the munition of rocks, bread shall be given him, his waters shall be sure. Where by bread and water, is signified this competency of outward blessings, and by the munition of rocks for his place of defence, is signified his shelter and security.

That these same blessings belong also to just honest men under the gospel, will appear both from the nature and reason of the thing, as we shall presently see, as well as from the like argument used both by our Saviour and his apostles in the New Testament. *Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and the righteousness thereof, and all these things shall be added unto you. Let your conversation be without covetousness,*

vetousness, and be content with such things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. He draws an argument from such a promise as we have been speaking of in the Old Testament, and applies it in the New. By the same way of reasoning, we may argue, that these promises I just now quoted out of the Old Testament, and all the other general promises there made, will be likewise performed in the New.

I could bring many more quotations to this purpose, but these are sufficient to prove what I intended, and something more ; as containing not only promises of a competency to the righteous honest persons themselves, but likewise a blessing to their house and posterity.

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As the holy scriptures are plain on this subject, so also, if we examine the matter by the rules of sober, right reason, we shall find it will teach us the same doctrine, namely, that justice and honesty in our dealings is the surest way to guard against want, and to enjoy this competency promised in my text. For the better imprinting such truths on the mind and memory, the following observations are well worthy consideration.

1st. The honest man is the best disposed to procure and receive the assistances of supernatural grace; for, being conscious to himself of his sincere upright intentions, he can with good assurance recommend his affairs to God's blessing and direction; whereas, the dishonest fraudulent man dares
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not call for God's blessing upon his wicked designs; or, if he does, he knows it is vain to expect it. Now, a man who believes he has God on his side, acts with another sort of life and chearfulness, and with another vigour and resolution, than he who knows he is alone in what he does, and that he may rather expect God's curse than his blessing. *The eyes of the Lord, says the Psalmist, are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry. The face of the Lord is against them that do evil.*

2dly. The honest man is most like to be kept in business and employ; for all men, whatever they may be themselves, love to find honesty in those with whom they deal, and hate to be cozened and cheated. This is so true
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an observation, that the greatest knaves have no other way to get employment; than by counterfeiting honesty, and pretending to be what they are not; in which if they happen to be discovered, as it is a thousand to one but they will, they are presently blown upon, and discountenanced, and every one is cautious of having any further dealings with such a person.

3dly. If the honest man wants credit, which is a great furtherance in worldly business, how easy a thing is it for him, after experience of his honesty, to find enough, more than he is willing to use? Whereas the dishonest man, so soon as his character is known, sinks in his credit, and carries on his affairs very heavily without that support.

4thly. *The upright honest man walketh surely*, as Solomon observes. He is not afraid of the detection of his servants, or the confessions of his accomplices and associates; when inquiries after bribery, oppression, and misdemeanors of all sorts are ever so strict, he is not daunted or cast down, as being conscious to himself of his uprightness and innocence: whereas the unjust man fears every thing, and is glad, when detected, to fly from justice, or to disgorge a great part of his ill-gotten wealth, that he may redeem the rest, or, perhaps, may buy off his life, which he has justly forfeited by his crimes.

The honest man hath this great advantage, that the more and the longer he is known, the better is he liked and

trusted, so that his reputation and his wealth have a gradual increase, as he comes to be better acquainted with mankind, and they with him : he wants but a fair introduction, and afterwards his honesty makes its own way, and will carry him through with honour ; whereas it is quite otherwise with the dishonest man, it is but for a present turn, at least for a short time, that his dissimulation and knavery is calculated. This, likewise, Solomon observed : *The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of transgressors shall destroy them.* Again, *The lip of truth shall be established for ever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment.*

There are infinite ways of providence, by which knaves are detected,

and honest men righted. On the one hand, all men are apt to pity an honest man if he falls into troubles through misfortunes; on the other hand, they have no compassion on a knave; he commonly sinks under distress, while the honest man triumphs over affliction. *A just man, saith Solomon, falleth seven times, and riseth up again, but the wicked shall fall into mischief.* Nay, if the dishonest man escapes in his own time, his ill-gotten estate seldom thrives with his heirs. It is true of him, what Solomon says, *An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning, and if hastily, seldom honestly, but the end thereof shall not be blest.*

I have not time to draw any inferences from the doctrine here explained,
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ed, and therefore shall conclude with a hearty prayer, that God may bless what has been said, and preserve us from every bias of injustice, and keep our hearts and minds in an even and righteous temper, through all the actions of our lives. A temper, which we have every reason to believe, will be attended with all sorts of spiritual and temporal blessings in Christ Jesus; and secure that eternal happiness in the world to come, which is promised to all his faithful disciples.

X
S E R M O N III.

Another Text

I CORINTH. iii. 11.

*Other foundation can no man lay, than
that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

grand support
THE fabric of our religion as
Christians, of all our faith and
hope, is laid on Jesus Christ as its
foundation. Wherefore, when St.
Peter had owned, and confessed Jesus *then*
to be Christ, the Son of the living
God, that is, the true Messiah and
Saviour of mankind promised to the

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Jews;

Jews; our Lord approving of this his confession, replied, *Blessed art thou, Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my father which is in heaven. Upon this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*

In the following discourse I shall therefore endeavour to shew, first, That Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the pardon of our sins, of our peace with God, and the salvation of our souls. And, Secondly, That there is no other way of salvation but by Christ.

1st. Christ is the foundation of the pardon of our sins. *We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our sins.* It is upon Christ's account, that God vouchsafed to pardon

don sinners. Hence that exhortation of the apostle, *Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.* To the same purpose are these known scriptures that follow: *Thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day; and that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name, whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of of sins. Be it known unto you, that through this man (that is, through Christ) is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses. We are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption*

redemption that is in Jesus Christ; whom God has set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood for the remission of sins. Christ also giving St. Paul his commission to preach the gospel to the gentiles, saith, I send thee to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins through faith that is in me. Lastly, Christ in the institution of the Lord's Supper, having taken the cup, ^{he adds} saith, This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.

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Thus, we see every where the forgiveness of sins is ascribed unto Christ. And hereunto may be referred all those places in which our justification is attributed unto Christ. For justification
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tion and the pardon of sin, though they be not altogether the same thing, yet are they so near of kin to each other, *all the* and so connected with one another, that justification cannot be ascribed unto Christ, but the pardon of sin must also be ascribed to him. Who- soever oweth his justification to Christ, must also be indebted to him for the forgiveness of his sins.

The Scripture also clearly & expressly affirms in many places that

2dly. Christ is the foundation of our reconciliation to God, and our peace with him. (This also the scripture clearly and expressly affirms in many places, attributing this inestimable blessing to him.) So the prophet Daniel speaking of the Messiah, saith, among other things, *that he was to make reconciliation for iniquity;* and the prophet Isaiah, speaking

ing of the sufferings of Christ, faith, *He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon him,* that is, by his sufferings our peace with God was procured and obtained. So in the fifth chapter of the epistle to the Romans, *If when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son; much more being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.* Also in the fifth chapter of the second epistle to the Corinthians, *All things are of God who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ. And it pleased the Father that in him, that is in Christ, should all fulness dwell; and having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things to himself.* Hence it is that the gospel (which reveals and offers Christ unto us, and propounds

propounds the terms of our peace with God, and our reconciliation to him through Christ) is called, the Ministry of Reconciliation; or rather perhaps the preaching of the gospel is so called by which men, who are by sin enemies to God, are solicited, persuaded, and importuned to be at peace with him. We see, therefore, nothing is, or can be more clearly and fully attested in scripture than this, "that our reconciliation to God, and our peace with him, is through Christ, (or that Christ is the foundation thereof.)"

I require little more proof than has been already given to satisfy you that

3dly. Christ is the foundation of our acceptance with God, (of the acceptance both of our persons and services.

This needs little more proof than what has been already given:) for if by Christ we are reconciled to God, and

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at peace with him; if through him we receive the atonement, by which means the breach that our sins had made between God and us, is so made up and closed, that he is become propitious and favourable to us, it hence follows, that through Christ we have acceptance with him; (we could have no acceptance with him as long as we were in a state of enmity; but Christ removing that enmity, and taking it away, we have now acceptance with God,) we have an interest in his favour, and may look upon him as a friend, yea, as a father, and upon all occasions make our addresses to him with the humble boldness of children. This our acceptance with him, and that boldness and freedom of access which we have to him, the scriptures constantly ascribe unto Christ.

God

God hath made us accepted in the beloved, that is, in Christ. (Such is in part the meaning of that voice from heaven, This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; well pleased with him, and for his sake, and upon his account, with all his, with all those who have by faith received him, and given up themselves to his conduct and government. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ; by whom also we have access by faith unto this grace wherein we stand, that is, into this state of grace, favour, and acceptance with God wherein we stand, and into which we are admitted.) As our persons are thus accepted through Christ, *if we be such as belong to him, so also are our ~~services~~ (and performances) ~~Ye~~ are an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual*

tual sacrifices, acceptable unto God by Jesus Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God, that is without faith in Christ, from whom we derive strength to perform what God requires of us; and through whom alone what we do hath acceptance with God. Our best services are so blemished and defiled with sin, that God might most justly abhor them; but Christ, who was herein shadowed by the high priest, takes away the imperfection of our holy things that they may be accepted. But how doth he take away the sinful imperfection of our services? Surely, not by altering the nature of them, (and by making our imperfect and sinful performances perfect and sinless. No such thing is done by him while we are here, for all our services still continue to be imperfect as long as

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as we are on this side heaven: but by *his* satisfying the justice of God for the sinful defects and imperfections of them, and by making intercession for us, that, (though our performances are imperfect, and blemished with sin, yet they may,) upon the account of the satisfaction which he hath made *they may* be accepted.

(This intercession of Christ for us, and his procuring the acceptance of our services, is signified and represented in the Revelations, where it is said, that *an angel*, the angel of the covenant, the eternal Son of God, *came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer, and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints, upon the golden altar which was before the throne.* His

putting incense, together with the prayers of the saints, into the golden censer, and so offering them up to God, denotes his rendering their prayers an odour of a sweet smell, pleasing and acceptable unto God. Thus then we see fully that Christ is the foundation of our acceptance with God, both as to our persons and services.)

Christ is likewise the foundation of eternal salvation in the other world. It were almost endless to mention all the particular scriptures which ascribe this unto Christ. To him is appropriated, and of right belongs the great and glorious title of the Saviour of the world. His business here was to bring salvation to lost and undone creatures, who must else have perished everlastingly. *This is a faithful saying,*
that

that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. The son of man is come to save that which was lost. For this reason he had the name of Jesus given him, by order from heaven, because he was to save his people from their sins, and to deliver them from the wrath to come. In short, the principal design of the gospel, is to make proclamation of salvation to be obtained by Christ, and to propound the terms on which it may be obtained. Him hath God exalted to be a prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins, and consequently eternal life. Whosoever believeth in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved. He is become the author of eternal salvation to all

that obey him. God hath not appointed us unto wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ.

As from what hath been said, it is evident that eternal life and all spiritual blessings are to be obtained through Christ, so it is as evident, which is the second thing I proposed to consider, that they are to be obtained no other way than only through him.

This is manifest from the threatnings of everlasting destruction to all that shall not believe in him, when made known to them, who shall not receive him as the gospel offers him, and rest on him for salvation. The threatnings to that purpose are most express. *He that believeth not on the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God*

God abideth on him. If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. If ye believe not that I am he, that I am the Christ, the true Messiah, and accordingly receive me, ye shall eternally perish. To the same effect is that terrible threatning: The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on all that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power. Here, everlasting destruction is threatened to all those who know not God, and obey not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, when that gospel is promulgated to them. Wherefore, if according to the import of these threatnings, all that receive not Christ, and believe not on him, shall

perish for ever : it hence undeniably follows, that as salvation is to be obtained by Christ, so it can be obtained no other way. If there were any other way of salvation, then all such as should put themselves into that way, might be saved, though they did not believe in Christ, which would make all those threatnings to be of none effect. In a word, therefore, from those threatnings we may infer, and certainly conclude, that there is no other way of salvation but by Christ. This is that which the ^{apostle} text expressly asserts, in words as full and plain as can be framed : *Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.*

If Christ then be the only foundation of the pardon of our sins, of our
peace

peace with God, and our reconciliation to him, of the acceptance of our persons and services, and the salvation of our souls, then let us build on this foundation, and on this alone, renouncing all other foundations, since such will certainly fail us, and betray our souls to everlasting misery. Wherefore, if we consult our eternal welfare in the other world, when this world and the fashion thereof shall pass away, let us renounce and disclaim them all. Such weak and rotten foundations there are many ; I shall mention some of them.

1st. The goodness and mercy of God, in general, and without reference to Christ. This is that on which some build all their hopes of happiness, to whom nevertheless the gospel

has been revealed. God being inconceivably good, and of infinite compassion, and his tender mercies being over all his works, they think they need not seek out after, they cannot have, a better ground, or surer foundation on which to build their hopes of eternal happiness, (though the gospel has been promulgated to them.) They confess they have been sinners, they have come short of their duty (many ways,) and have been guilty of many failings in the course of their lives; but, however, they are satisfied, that a God of such infinite goodness and mercy, a God of such tender compassion as he hath in his word declared himself to be, will not for their sins, though many and great, utterly cast them off, and adjudge them to eternal punishment. How such a strict dispensation

penetration should consist with such infinite mercy and tender compassion, they cannot comprehend, and therefore they hope they need not in the least fear it: they cast themselves *thru* wholly upon his mercy, and a safer course for securing their souls, they believe they cannot take. These men think they build upon a sure and strong foundation, but they are greatly deceived, and will one day find their error.

It is true God is a God of infinite justice also, against all unbelieving, and finally impenitent sinners. He is a God that hath declared, that *he will in no wise clear the guilty*, even there where he hath proclaimed himself, *The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long suffering, and abundant*

dant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin.

be assured however

Notwithstanding his infinite mercies and tender compassion, *(He hath prepared Topbet of old, he hath made it deep and large, the pile whereof is fire and much wood, and the breath of the Lord like a stream of brimstone doth kinde it.)* He hath ordained a place for the punishment of all wicked and ungodly men, *where the worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched.*

Take heed, therefore, how you expect to find mercy with God, you to whom the gospel is revealed, upon any other conditions than those on which mercy through Christ is in the gospel offered and promised.

Mercy

Mercy itself will not pity or save you, unless you seek and expect it in God's own way, and that way is through the satisfaction that Christ hath made to the justice of God, by faith applied. *Him hath God set forth as a propitiation through faith in his blood for the remission of sins. Text*

Another weak and sandy foundation, on which many build their hopes of heaven and eternal happiness, is, their moral righteousness and good works. They are just in their dealings, they pay every man what is due to him, they are useful to their neighbours and acquaintance, they wrong no one; and having thus ordered their conversation, and framed the course of their lives, they know not what can be further required or expected from them

them in order to salvation. If such as have thus demeaned themselves may not hope to go to heaven, they know not who may.

It must be confessed
1st. These, I grant, are ^{very} good things; they are things highly commendable in whomsoever they are found; they are things in which multitudes who bear the name of Christ, and have taken upon them the profession of the christian religion, are greatly deficient, and shamefully fall short, to the great reproach of that holy religion of which they make profession.

Nay, these things are absolutely and indispensably necessary to salvation; no man may think to go to heaven ^{either} without them. Works of justice and righteousness.

righteousness, it is plain, are absolutely necessary to salvation; for God hath declared, that *the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God*. Nor are works of mercy less necessary to salvation; the neglect of these, the not feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, shewing compassion to the distressed stranger, and the like, will occasion that dreadful sentence at the day of judgement, to be pronounced on all who neglect such offices of charity, *Go ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels; for he that sheweth no mercy, shall have judgment without mercy.*

But though all this be most true, though good works of justice, or righteousness, and mercy, be highly commendable in themselves, nay, absolutely

lutely necessary to salvation, yet may no man think to be justified and saved for, or by these things alone. This, the apostle often teacheth us, and he much insists on it, as on a matter of great weight and importance. *We have all sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. We conclude, that a man is justified by faith, and not by the works of the law. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the holy ghost, which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; that being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. By grace ye are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift*

gift of God. Not of works, lest any man should boast. By the deeds of the law, there shall no flesh be justified in his sight; for, by the law cometh the knowledge of sin. We know that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ.

Thus, we see, it is the constant doctrine of the apostle, which he frequently repeats and inculcates, that a man is not justified, and consequently that he is not saved by the works of the law. Wherefore, ~~for~~ ^{these} any man to rely, and rest on his good works alone for justification and salvation, is a most dangerous thing, and a rock on which his soul will certainly be eternally shipwrecked. The reason hereof is evident; for he that would be justified and saved by his works, must exactly

actly conform to the law in every tittle ; he must have attained to obedience in all things, he must have done it all his days, and he must continue to do it unto the end, even to the last moment of his life ; for, if at any time, he shall fail but in one thing, that alone unavoidably brings him under the condemnation ; for, *curst is every one that continueth not in all that is written in the law to do it.*)

Those who rely wholly on their good works, and make account they have done enough to bring them to heaven, and more cannot be required of them in order to salvation, would do well to consider,

1st. That it is possible they may be much mistaken in the good opinion which

which they entertain concerning their performances. They boast they have never wronged nor injured any man, nor been any way wanting in their duty to their neighbour. But this is a great thing, and more than can be affirmed concerning any man living. For let it be granted; that they have never injured any man by fraud, by violence, or oppression, or by any other act of notorious injustice; have they never coveted nor desired any thing belonging to their neighbour? Have they never envied him that which he hath had above themselves, and wherein he hath excelled them? Have they never injured him in his good name and reputation? Have they never defamed any, or spoken evil of them? Have they never taken up evil reports against them from others

causelessly? Have they never entertained evil surmises, causeless suspicions, and groundless jealousies concerning others? Who is there in the world that can say he was never guilty of any of these offences? Sure he must be a great stranger to himself, and miserably blind, that can acquit himself from all these things. Wherefore, if we consult the eternal well-being of our souls, what other course can we take, than disclaiming all our own righteousness, and counting our best services but dross, in respect of the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, to rely on his intercession for salvation.

Thus far concerning such as build their hopes of eternal life upon their own good works.

Others

Others there are who so rest on Christ for salvation, as that they make their enjoyment of outward privileges the ground of their hope (of salvation by him.) That they have in their infancy been dedicated to Christ, and by baptism admitted into the visible church; that they have been instructed and educated in the christian religion; that they have lived where the light of the gospel shines, and that they have attended on the public ordinances of God; that they have been hearers of the word, frequent communicants at the Lord's table, and the like; these are the things from which they think they may warrantably conclude that they may expect salvation from Christ. But their partaking of these outward privileges, without faith and repentance, are no sufficient evidences of their in-

terest in Christ, nor consequently of their title to heaven through him. Let us not, therefore, rest in these things, but labour to (get oil in our lamps, to be furnished with true grace in our hearts, or else we are sure to be shut out of heaven (with the foolish virgins) notwithstanding all our external privileges.

These things considered, what diligence can be thought sufficient to be given in labouring after a true and lively faith, a sound repentance and conversion, (and all those better things that accompany salvation) to make our calling and election sure, that we may not be ashamed of our confident expectation of finding mercy with God through Christ, and fall short of salvation at last. With what fear and trembling

trembling should we be working out our salvation! How jealous should we be of our deceitful hearts, lest they should delude us, by persuading us that we are sound christians; and when we come to be tried at the day of judgment by the searcher of hearts, we should be found to be no better than hypocrites, (and our hope be as the spider's web, or the giving up of the ghost.) It will then be too late to be looking after oil for our lamps when the bridegroom is already come. Let us therefore do our great work, and do it effectually, while it is called to-day, while the accepted time, and the day of salvation lasts, and before the things belonging to our peace be hid from our eyes.

nothing should we be waiting on
our labour! How useless should
we be of our beautiful hearts, if they
should be idle as by putting us
that we are foundlings, and when
we come to be tried in the day of
tribulation, by the severity of trials,
we should be found to be no better
than hypocrites, and our hope be as
the spider's web, or the giving up of
the ghost. It will then be too late to
be looking after oil for our lamps when
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us therefore do our great work, and
do it effectually, while it is called to-
day, while the accepted time, and the
day of salvation lasts, and before the
things belonging to our peace be hid
from our eyes. A gulf of darkness

is to be that our Lord's hands
are ready to help us, that we may
S. E. R. C. 3

S E R M O N IV.

JEREMIAH xvii. Part of ver. 9.

The heart is deceitful above all things.

ONE of the finest lessons that un-
 assisted wisdom ever taught, is
 the celebrated maxim, "Know thy-
 self;" so highly applauded in the
 schools of the antient philosophers.
 Several made use of it as one of their
 favourite tenets, and it was inscribed
 upon the temple of Apollo at Delphi,
 as the advice of that God. Among
 others Cicero affirms it to be the
 most divine precept that philosophy

ever furnished, the noblest present that ever wisdom made to man ; inasmuch as she alone taught them, not only the nature of other things, but by this brought them acquainted with themselves.

The privilege which the soul enjoys of descending into itself, was always reckoned and acknowledged to be of infinite worth. We see that the very heathens were not strangers to the great benefits and advantages of contemplation, as it was the foundation of that celebrated maxim of theirs above-mentioned. Yet, if we consider what they understood by this knowledge, and the use they made of it, we christians shall be very far from being satisfied with them.

For,

For, indeed, they meant little else by it, than that we ought to meditate upon the nature, the qualities, and the actions of the mind; that we ought to admire the force of reason, the depth of our understandings, and the many kinds of knowledge to which we are capable of attaining. Their thoughts were almost entirely employed upon the raising the dignity of man, and giving him a fair prospect of his own excellencies. Their whole intent seems to be that by this engaging prospect, he might be brought to a contempt of every thing below him, and learn to distinguish himself from the beasts of the field by his behaviour, as much as he is placed above them by nature.

This is all the morality they deduced from this admirable precept.
Instead

Instead of sweetening their passions, or correcting any of their failures, they only improved the beautiful features of their own pictures.

The gloomy prospect of their vices and misery they laid aside, as fit only to humble their pride and diminish their consequence; insomuch that the knowledge of themselves, rather served the interests of presumption and vanity, than of lowliness and humility. But such considerations as these will never heal the infirmities of human nature. To do this, we should not only reflect upon the divinity of our extraction, but also upon the stain and blemish we have brought upon it by sin, by our fallen state of misery and corruption.

To this, however, the antient philosophers could never attain; they were unacquainted with the original cause of sin in man, and the occasions of the wonderful contradictions we find in ourselves. This mixture of dignity and meanness, of reason and folly, of which we are sensible, was hid from their eyes. They fancied reason as powerful as ever she had been, not being aware of any disorder and confusion in the soul, from the havock made there by sin.

Thus, in love with themselves, and their own deceitful hearts; thus insensible, or regardless of the weak side of human nature, they made a false step in the very first principles of morality and religion.

But

But revelation has truly taught us the knowledge of ourselves; by this we understand, not only that we came out of the hands of God, but how we were changed when we were thrust out of paradise. We are fully acquainted with our folly and weakness, and, at length, with the first rise and occasion of our being so, (namely) the heart's deceitfulness, for *the heart is deceitful above all things.*

In treating upon these words, I shall endeavour to explain, 1st, What is meant by the heart, and in what respects it is so deceitful.

2dly. The reason of its deceitfulness.

3dly. Give some instances where
this

this deceitfulness chiefly appears, and then make some short reflections.

1st. What is meant in this place by the heart, and in what respect it is so deceitful. We are to understand by the heart in this place, the inward qualities of man; his thoughts, his will, his affections and desires; in a word, the fountain of his judgments, his inclinations, and resolutions. Now, that our heart is deceitful with regard to God, is manifest from the many promises of repentance and amendment we violate, from the vows we make, from the good resolutions which pass away as a morning cloud and the early dew, and from the vain confidence we put in our strength, though it has so often deceived us. It is also deceitful with relation to men, from whom

whom we often conceal our real thoughts and sentiments. How common a thing is it to hear God and religion brought into question, to cover private pique and resentment; how common to hear of his cause and his truth being at stake, whilst pride and interest, envy, hatred, and malice, are at the bottom, and the only points indeed that are really regarded.

How often, in a word, do we act contrary to our most steadfast purposes, being wholly at the command of our passions and appetites. How often is reason sullied and debased, and made subservient to folly and vice.

I am now, secondly, to give the reasons of this deceitfulness. Of all creatures, man is the most fickle and in-

constant: our judgments, our opinions, and our passions are subject to prodigious vicissitudes; what we the last moment pursued with the greatest eagerness and desire, now palls upon the sense; the warm sentiments of love and affection, are soon turned into disrespect, or hatred; and, perhaps, we may now believe what once appeared incredible.

When the duties of religion are to be performed, how hard a matter is it to keep the mind for any considerable time in a composed temper. Suppose we resolve firmly to serve God, a Being truly amiable, immediately other objects present themselves, better suited to flesh and blood, and more proportioned to sense. We give over our first design, and cast ourselves into the embraces

embraces of those which work upon our imaginations so agreeably.

When we pray, meditate, or reflect upon the state of our souls, how difficult is it to fix upon those acts of devotion; how soon will other thoughts break in upon us, and a thousand distractions crowd in to intercept us. A good resolution formed in the heat and warmth of our zeal, pleases for a while, but as soon as this fervour is over, and grown a little cool, the heart finding more pleasure and less restraint in its ordinary courses, than in the execution of its new designs, changes its holy purposes, and proves deceitful.

Again, we are inconstant from the dark and empty state of the soul, the liberty

liberty of it being very undetermined, and of great extent. Its hopes and expectations are larger than any present enjoyments can be, and its fears and doubts more grievous than any accidents themselves, about which it is in so much concern. Now such narrowness of capacity, joined to such boundless desires, must make the soul restless and inquisitive, eager after novelty, fickle, and out of humour with every thing. Upon the whole, then, is it possible that the heart which is uniform and constant to nothing but sin, should not be deceitful?

3dly. I shall now give some instances wherein the deceitfulness of the heart chiefly appears.

The heart often imposes upon the understanding in the judgment it

passes upon things. How careful are we to magnify the value of those pursuits, for which we have a relish? How will our over-heated imagination give them beauties which they have not, and cause them to shine in borrowed lustre?

The fancy endeavours to ennoble the pleasures of sense, to remove whatever may be low or mean, and add a greater degree of delicacy and refinement than they deserve. It conceals the vanity and short continuance of them. It contributes all it can to their worth and solidity; and when to the eye of reason they appear to be very fleeting and uncertain, yet the heart will endeavour to paint them in lively colours, and recommend them as things, though of a short duration, yet of an exquisite nature: thus being

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captivated

captivated by an airy bubble, the heart leaves the path of virtue, and shews itself deceitful.

A second instance of the deceitfulness of the heart, appears in the many vain pretences, it uses to embolden us to sin. It is not a little surprising by how many shifts and wiles it debauches our reason, and hurries us away to commit that which is evil. It represents each circumstance to the best advantage, that it may set a keener edge upon our desires. If a thing has turned to more than ordinary account, or if it has furnished us with more delight than we expected; the memory of it is called in to seduce us by the agreeableness of what is past.

The heart overvaluing former enjoyments, promises itself imaginary
blessings H 2 happiness

happiness, vastly greater than what will be found upon trial. It suggests that the pleasures of sin are present, and the punishment of it remote, and at a great distance. It will dress up pride in the habit of magnanimity, prodigality in that of generosity, oppression in that of strict justice. A rude and fallen demeanour, a fiery temper, and an exterminating spirit, shall be called only a becoming concern for the glory and honour of religion.

Under these false names and specious appearances, the worst of vices are not only countenanced, but thought necessary to be committed. Nay, the dictates of a heart entirely under subjection to the lusts of the flesh, are sometimes looked upon as the breathing of God's holy spirit upon the soul; evil is called

called good, and darkness light; or if the heart cannot disguise them thus far, it will lessen the odious nature of them. It will bring in our age, our complexion, or the company we keep, as a colouring or excuse; it will prompt us to give way to our passions, under a pretence of natural bias, and the hope that we shall stop when we come to such a point, and not go to the utmost bounds.

If those methods will not succeed, it will secretly lay before us some pretended good, which may be easily purchased by a little sin; and insinuate that the righteous end will surely enough consecrate us pious. The world shall be thrown into confusion and disorder, the closest friends, the nearest relations, and best neighbours

shall be persuaded to act with the greatest injustice, and the greatest violence to each other, because the interest of religion demands it; and notwithstanding all that St. Paul can say to the contrary, it may be lawful to do evil when so great and wonderful a good is proposed as the consequence.

A third instance of the deceitfulness of the heart, is its behaviour after the commission of sin. It endeavours to forget or excuse our crimes; when conscience is awakened, it silences its admonitions, and lulls it to sleep by flattery and ill-grounded hopes; it raises us up other passions, it presents us with fresh pleasures, and by keeping us perpetually engaged, it stifles our reason and smothers the pangs and uneasiness of our breast; it will

will strive to allay the clamours of a wounded conscience by business or pleasure; but if it cannot drown all uneasy thoughts it will make an apology for, and offer some plea or other to soften our disquietude.

We shall be ready to say that the temptations were strong, the occasions pressing, the company agreeable, and that man is only a frail compound of flesh and blood, and therefore an object rather of pity and compassion than blame and punishment.

The last instance I shall give of the deceitfulness of the heart, is taken from the many false religions, and absurd modes of worship in the world. Hence sprung up the heathen idolatry, hence came men's understandings to be cor-

rupted, so that they fell down to stock and stones; to gods which are no gods, and who were remarkable for nothing so much as indulging some of the worst of human passions. For what has occasioned and countenanced so many errors in religion, but a deceitful heart, fed with pride and curiosity, strong prejudices, and a love of singularity.

If it had not been for this, the life and spirit of devotion would never have been choaked up by pompous ceremonies and ridiculous pageantries. It is this alone has engrafted the caprices of superstition upon the simplicity of real and substantial piety, and made many believe that if they do but scrupulously and precisely perform the outward services of religion, this will compensate for sincere goodness and unaffected virtue,

virtue, and the form of godliness will do as well as the reality.

I come now to make a reflection or two upon what has been said, and so conclude. First then, the deceitfulness of our hearts ought to give us a distrust of ourselves, and teach us not to rely too much upon our own strength, according to Solomon, who tells us, *He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool,*

Would that man be accounted wise, who should give credit to a cheat or impostor, which had often imposed on his belief; and shall we after we have had so many instances of our weakness and treachery, depend upon our own power? Do we not daily see how the virtues of the best men are sullied

sullied by the violence of passion, and the overflowings of corruption.

Should we not then by the rules of common prudence, take the same, nay greater care of the soul than of the body? When we find ourselves in a perfect state of health, do we not endeavour to preserve it by wholesome diet, moderate exercise, and general temperance? Should we not then when we feel our heart in a good frame, and well-disposed temper, use the same, or rather greater caution and circumspection over its inclinations? Ought we not to be perpetually upon our guard, and avoid every temptation and occasion to sin?

2dly. The deceitfulness of the heart should be a means to put us upon examining

examining ourselves frequently, whether we have been defective in respect to our own or our neighbour's welfare; for our conscience will readily dictate to us, according as we have acted, either comfort and satisfaction, or remorse and disquiet.

If we have done as we ought to have done, the remembrance will be pleasing and delightful; but if we have been so unhappy as to fail in this particular, then we ought to think of making restitution to the persons injured, and this will free us from melancholy and despair, while the thoughts of having done every thing which becomes a good christian, will support us in all our troubles, and give us courage and comfort in the hour of death.

Lastly,

Lastly. Let us endeavour to preserve in our souls real and unaffected integrity, and sincerity in the sight of God, by correcting our corrupt and faulty passions, by setting the Lord continually before us, and by taking heed to all our ways; remembering that *the heart is deceitful above all things, and, without this constant care and watchfulness over it, is apt to become desperately wicked,*

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S E R M O N V.

ECCLESIASTES iii. 12.

*I know that there is no good in them,
but for a man to rejoice, and do good
in his life.*

THIS book is supposed to be
written by Solomon, towards
the close of his life, as a recantation
of his error, in departing from the
worship of the true God to that of
idols; and he declares herein to all
posterity, what sorrow and regret he
had

had conceived for his lamentable fall, and how earnestly he detested all those pleasures and delights whereby he had been seduced, as vanity and vexation of spirit, as incapable of affording any solid pleasure and content of mind, much less of leading him to the enjoyment of his supreme good, eternal happiness.

His design throughout is to invite and conduct all others, by his example, to piety and virtue, as being the only paths to true felicity. To this end he first of all gives us a brief relation of his own course of life, and of those things men are wont to pursue, with the utmost diligence and application, hoping to find happiness and satisfaction in them, but that he had found them all to be vanity, such as tempted
bad men

men to sin, by promising them pleasures, and expired always in vexation and disquiet.

From hence he exhorts all men to resign themselves to the conduct of true wisdom, *i. e.* religion; to fear God, and apply themselves to good works; this being the only thing to give us a true relish and pleasure in the enjoyments of this world, *I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and do good in his life.*

Whatever we may fondly imagine or expect from them, I know, says he, (by a dearly purchased experience) that there is no good in them, but only when we make them instruments of doing good, then may we truly rejoice in them; then only do these vain
and

and transitory possessions administer a real joy, a solid, durable pleasure, when we employ them to the service and benefit of mankind. In truth, had there been any real happiness in the pleasures of this world, it is impossible but so extraordinary a person, who had all things at his command, who made the most curious and critical enquiries into every thing here below, it is impossible but such a man must have discovered it. And, perhaps, God permitted him to make so bold an use of his knowledge and capacity, to shew us the weakness and folly of all worldly pursuits. For, alas! after the closest and most diligent search, after he had ransacked the remotest parts of the then known world, examined into, and experienced every thing in nature, behold the result of
his

his studies; he is disappointed; and fatigued, and pronounces all to be vanity and vexation.

It is true; every thing was created good, and the good things of this world were intended for the comfort and refreshment of mankind; but by our abuse and misapplication, they become vain; that is, when we employ them to the pampering of pride and luxury; when we suffer them to steal away our hearts from God and virtue, or expect greater happiness from them than they were by nature furnished to afford us. In this case, the vanity we charge them with, is justly and properly our own; and when we are cheated and ruined by their inconstancy, the fault is not in them, but ourselves; it is not

owing to their deficiency, but our own folly.

We are naturally apt to entertain large hopes from worldly enjoyments; the riches, honours, and pleasures of this life, are what we are taught from our childhood to pursue, as things that can make us truly great and happy; and had we no other demands but those of the body to provide for, this world might satisfy us. But we feel something within us vast and extensive in its desires; we find ourselves capable of, and thirsting after, greater happiness than this world can give; we find the soul is not to be satisfied with meat and drink, with wealth and sensual pleasures: *Man cannot live by bread alone.*

Yet,

Yet, this is our folly, we think our houses shall continue for ever; that our lands and estates can supply the soul, as well as the body, with all conveniences; we look upon these things as fixt and permanent, which are vain and fleeting; and, through the delusion of a strong fancy, we imagine ourselves at home, when we are only upon our journey, and expect better accommodations than are possible to be had. For this reason it is, that we find ourselves so sadly disappointed in all the satisfactions of this world; that we hear such complaints of the misery of this life, and our big hopes of happiness sink into vanity and vexation of spirit.

But did we know how to use the good things of this world, or had we

the wisdom to use them in such a manner, and for such purposes, as God and nature have prescribed and directed, there would be no room for such complaints, because no danger of being thus deceived and undone by them. This is what the wise preacher has pointed out in the passage before us: he has here taught us how to use this world, so as not to abuse it, nor be abused by it; how to keep the pleasures of sense from being a vexation to the spirit; how to make that which is vanity, become subservient to that which is substantial felicity. This there is but one way in the world to do, and that is, *to rejoice, and do good.*

The great and principal ends, for which the divine bounty has given
man

man the free enjoyment of worldly blessings, are but these two, that we should rejoice, and do good in this life. And, surely, no man would desire to be upon happier terms with his Maker, since he is permitted first to please himself, to take what is sufficient for his own refreshment, and then out of his superfluities to administer to the wants of others,

A wise man is temperate in all things; amidst the delicacies of the most richly spread table, he desires no more than what may restore and exhilarate nature; and a generous hospitable man who loves to communicate, is as much pleased in another's satisfaction as his own; by contributing to another's happiness, he receives an addition to his own, and, indeed, ne-

ver rejoices so much as when it is in his power to make others rejoice with him.

For this reason, a man of a narrow, fordid disposition, in the largest affluence of worldly blessings, never enjoys himself in any; he has no real satisfaction in what he seems to possess, because he is afraid to part from it; and is never the better for it himself, because he will suffer none else to be so.

But in order to a wise improvement of the things of this world, we are here directed,

1st. To rejoice in them.

2dly. To do good. For,

3dly.

3dly. There is no other way to extract any real happiness from the enjoyment of them, but by thus doing good with them.

That men may rejoice in the good things of life, we are told in the verse following the text, *is the gift of God*. It is freely allowed to all, and most men are ready enough to take their portion herein; all the danger is, lest they should debase and spoil their joy, and not rejoice in these things as they are the gift of God.

Men are extremely apt to rejoice in their wealth, honours, and worldly acquisitions, as if they were the product of their own skill, the effect of their own industry and contrivance; and so flattering themselves as if they

acquired them by their own power, they are tempted to think they have a right to use them according to their own pleasure. But all such rejoicing is no better than that presumptuous boast of king Nebuchadnezzar, when he said to himself, *Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of my kingdom, by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty.* For which there came a voice to him immediately, *The kingdom is departed from thee.* It is an impious mistake to imagine these things to be the natural issue of human dexterity, which are the free donations of God's bounty. It is his blessing only that maketh rich; and if we would make riches a blessing, we must enjoy them as such, with all due thankfulness and acknowledgement to the supreme donor, with
temperance

temperance and moderation, that we forget not the giver, nor the ends for which they were given.

A religious sense of the divine goodness, would refine and sublimate those earthly comforts, and give a double pleasure in every enjoyment of life.—What is it, but the want of this, that makes the most exquisite pleasures insipid, and the heart of the wicked in the midst of laughter sorrowful?

It is a sense of religion only that teaches a man how to enjoy good in his labours, as the wise man has expressed it; how to allay the crosses and disappointments that are apt to intrude on the happy intervals of life; and how to take his portion of pleasure, because God answereth him in
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the joy of his heart. Without this a man may have riches, and health, and every thing he can desire, and yet not enjoy himself in any thing, *for this, says he, is the gift of God,* and such a one as he never gives, but to the good man.

So that we see men lose the best and greatest part of their satisfaction in worldly blessings, and are no less injurious to themselves than to Almighty God, when they forget or neglect to acknowledge the great Author of them, *from whom cometh every good and perfect gift.* But

2dly. As we are permitted to rejoice in the gifts of Providence, so are we required to do good with them. This we are obliged to do on many accounts,

counts ; but I shall only insist upon it, at present, as it is a testimony of the common gratitude and homage we owe to our Supreme Lord, and Benefactor.

Gratitude is a genuine dictate of nature, and to make returns in proportion to what is received, is a rule that runs through the whole creation. *The ox knoweth his owner*, and requites him by his labour ; the earth returns the seed by a plentiful harvest, and the sea throws back the rivers that run into it. Thus, in all societies, one kind of commerce is supported, as one nation is by another, and all subsist upon a principle of gratitude. *The king himself*, says Solomon, *is served by the field*, and the product of his country makes it worthy his protection

But

But how, you will say, shall a man express his gratitude to his Maker? Can we by all our good works be profitable to him? or contribute in any respect to the advancement of his happiness, which is already infinite, and admits of no addition? It is true, we must confess with the Psalmist, *Our goodness extendeth not unto him*, but then our righteousness and our charity may be helpful to men like ourselves, and the doing good to these, God is graciously pleased to look upon as an honour done to himself. *Whosoever giveth you a cup of cold water only*, says our kind Redeemer, *in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*

Indeed, our best services, our most extraordinary performances of this
kind,

kind, amount to no more in proportion, than one drop of water to the immense ocean; but still God requires them as his due, and it is what we must pay, not with intent to enrich him, but only by way of acknowledgment that we hold all from him.

This is that homage whereby we insure our title to, and our possession of the good things we enjoy under the kind protection of his providence.

3dly. We may observe there is no other way to make them serviceable to our happiness, or extract any real comfort from them, but by thus doing good with them. This is what the wise man intends chiefly to inculcate in the words before us; *I know*, says he, *that there is no good in them, but*
for

for a man to rejoice, and do good. This is the wisest improvement we can make of those things, to our present advantage, as well as our future felicity. To employ our wealth, our learning, power, and other talents to the service of mankind, is certainly the way to make them turn to the best account, and bring in the greatest gain to ourselves; for what other uses would we put them to?

Should we, for instance, like the miser, lock up our wealth from the world and ourselves, not using it at all? What pleasure can be conceived in this? What advantage barely to behold it with our eyes? This makes us not the masters and owners of it, but rather slaves and drudges to it. This makes it a punishment

nishment to be rich, a plague and vexation instead of a pleasure.

Should we, on the other hand, spend it in riotous and licentious living, or in the more gay and refined entertainments of life. Why, truly, this also is vanity; the pleasure these things seem to afford is mere amusement and delusion, and will certainly be attended with remorse and pain in the end, when we come to reflect that we have thrown away two of our most precious talents, time and riches, which were capable of much nobler improvements; that we have spent, perhaps, the greatest part of our life in diversions, nor thought of its main business.

These trifles, says an ingenious author, cannot pray for us; but the

poor and distressed, whom they keep us from relieving, may either successfully pray to God for us, or cry to him against us. The passage in scripture that represents the rich man in hell, without saying that he oppressed or defrauded any, gives no other account of his doom, but that faring sumptuously, he neglected to relieve the suffering poor.

But the pleasures of doing good are truly noble, sublime, and lasting; they will support our spirits under the worst circumstances of life; will be a reviving cordial at the hour of death, when all others fail; will follow us into the other world, and be a part of the happiness of blessed spirits in heaven.

How

How inferior are the choicest delights of sin, in comparison of those we receive from the consciousness of having, in any respect, promoted the welfare and happiness of mankind? Can all the sensual entertainments in the world administer such a solid pleasure, as the doing of one good action, such as men must applaud and commend, such as God must approve and reward?

Bread and Wine, says the Psalmist, *were given to make glad the heart of man*; but it never answers this end so effectually, as when it is generously communicated to our hungry and thirsty neighbour. So that the giving a cup of water only in charity, the meanest and smallest benefaction to the poor and miserable, shall yield us

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a greater

a greater pleasure, than the spending a thousand years, if that were possible, in all the revels of luxury and intemperance.

This then is the only improvement we can make of the good things of life, by thus making them instruments of doing good to mankind; since, at the same time we are so employing them, we are doing good to ourselves, and promoting our own happiness both here and hereafter; we are taking the best method of giving ourselves a true relish of the enjoyments of this life, and lay up for ourselves a good foundation against the time to come, that we may lay hold on eternal life.

S E R M O N VI.

PROVERBS V. 21.

The ways of man are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings.

THE government of Divine Providence over the actions of men is here clearly asserted. He pondereth them, he weigheth them as in a balance, and observeth them with the greatest exactness. He beholdeth them not merely as an idle spectator who is wholly unconcerned and indifferent about them, but as the Supreme Go-

vernor and Judge, who is to direct and overrule our actions, to the wise purposes of his providence, and to reward or punish them in the properest manner, and in the fittest season. *Thine eyes are upon all the ways of the sons of men, saith the prophet, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.*

I shall therefore in the following discourse consider the providence of God as respecting the actions of men, both with regard to their good and evil tendency.

First. All the good actions men perform are under the divine inspection and government. He is perfectly acquainted with the principles from which they flow, and all the circumstances

stances that attend them. He makes use of them for answering the ends of his moral government, for promoting the interests of his kingdom, and the good order of the world, and for rendering men useful to one another. It is pleasing to him to see his reasonable creatures acting in a manner agreeable to the nature with which he has endued them, and employing the active powers he hath given them to valuable purposes. He ordereth it so in his providence, that such good actions are often in some measure rewarded even in this life, and procure present blessings and advantages to those who perform them; at least they are attended with an inward conscious satisfaction, which is far to be preferred before any sensual pleasures and gratifications. Or if, as is frequently the case in

this state of trial and discipline, good actions are attended with great difficulties and discouragements, and through the ignorance of mistaken and prejudiced, or the malice and wickedness of ill designing men, meet with very bad returns, and expose the doers of them to present temporal evils and sufferings, he will certainly take care that they shall be rewarded in a future state: not one of them shall be forgotten before God, they shall be produced into open view, and shall receive an ample and glorious recompence.

Nor doth the regard which the providence of God hath to men's good actions, appear only in that he observeth and approveth them, and will take care that they shall be properly rewarded

rewarded in the fittest season ; but it is farther to be considered, that Divine Providence frequently interesteth itself in exciting men to good actions, and assisting them in the exercise of those good actions, and in removing impediments, and furnishing proper occasions and opportunities. It cannot reasonably be denied, that God may have many ways of doing this, without infringing the freedom which belongeth to men as they are moral agents, and so as that the good deeds they perform may still be truly and properly said to be of their own doing, and may be rewarded as such. There is nothing in such a supposition but what is worthy of God, and agreeable to his supreme wisdom and goodness. The doctrine of the holy scriptures is very clear and express on this head ;

and it is of great importance to us to have a sense of it strongly fixed upon our minds.

What an animating consideration must it needs be, when we set about the performing of a good action, to be assured that the great Lord and Father of all, on whom our happiness depends, observeth the good deed in every circumstance, and is ready to assist us in the performance of it, and to support us under the difficulties which may attend it! This should both encourage us to apply to God by prayer for his divine assistance, and should engage us, when we have done any thing that is good, to give thanks to his holy name for the opportunities he hath put into our hands, and the gracious aids he hath been pleased to afford us.

Secondly.

Secondly. Let us now consider how far the providence of God concerneth itself about men's evil actions; for here the difficulty principally lies.

In order to clear this, the following things may be observed.

1st. God never is the proper author or cause of evil actions. He never impells men by any positive influence to the commission of those actions. This necessarily follows from the perfect holiness and righteousness of his nature, which is frequently declared and asserted in the strongest manner in the sacred writings. Evil and sinful actions are what he most expressly forbiddeth in his law; and it were greatly absurd and dishonourable to him to suppose that he should

should incline, or determine men by any positive influence to commit those actions which he himself hath forbidden and condemned, and against which he hath denounced awful punishments. The true original cause of men's doing bad actions, is owing to their own corrupt inclinations, and to their abuse of their liberty, and therefore on themselves they are properly chargeable. This is what St. James signifies in that remarkable passage, *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted of evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.*

2dly. Another thing which ought to be considered, with regard to the providence of God, as respecting men's evil

evil actions, is, that though they are what he cannot but disapprove, yet he frequently over-rules them for serving the wise purposes of his government, and takes occasion from thence to bring about his own excellent designs. In this no small part of the wisdom of Divine Providence in its administration towards mankind doth consist.

It may be useful to take a distinct view of some instances of this kind.

Thus, for example, God frequently makes use of the evil actions of some men to punish the sins of others, and to execute his just judgments upon them.

It is an observation that hath been made by those who have carefully considered

considered the present course of things, that a great part of the outward punishments inflicted upon bad men in this life, are the effects of the evil actions of other bad men. Now, though in such cases the evils and mischiefs inflicted upon the sufferers, may be wrong and unjust as coming from the immediate actors of them, who have nothing in view but the gratifying their own passions, or promoting, what they take to be, their worldly interest; yet it is wise and just in God to order it so, that the effects of those injurious actions fall upon persons who really deserve to be punished for their own wickedness. Thus what the king of Assyria only designed for answering the ends of his own ambition, was over-ruled by God in the just punishment of the
Jews

Jews for their idolatry, hypocrisy, and great corruption of manners; as is signified in that remarkable passage of *Isaiah*, *O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation; I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire in the streets. Howbeit, he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so, but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few.*

As God thus often makes use of the evil actions of wicked men to punish the wickedness of other bad men, so he also over-rules them for chastising his own children on the account of their iniquities. A remarkable instance of

of this we have in the punishments inflicted upon David for the sins he had committed. For though he had sincerely repented of them, yet it was proper that crimes of so heinous a nature, and which had caused so great scandal, should be followed with public open marks of the divine displeasure. Hence it was that Absalom was suffered to carry his rebellion to so great a height, to seduce his father's concubines, to drive him from his capital city, and reduce him to the utmost danger and distress. The true immediate cause of all this was Absalom's wickedness, who freely followed the dictates of his own ambition, and the bent of his corrupt and vicious inclinations. God in his righteous providence so ordered it, that he had an opportunity given him of gratifying these

these his wicked inclinations and ambitious views. This was permitted as a just punishment for the crimes of which David had been guilty, as appears from the threatenings denounced against him on this account by the prophet, in the name of God.

The like observation may be made with regard to Shimei's cursing David. When Abishai would have killed him, David said, *No, let him curse, because the Lord hath said unto him, curse David. Who shall then say, wherefore hast thou done so?* This is not to be understood as if God had expressly commanded Shimei to curse David, or had put that malice and wickedness in his heart, or moved his tongue to utter those opprobrious expressions; but circumstances were so disposed, that

Shimei had a favourable opportunity given him to vent the malice, the envy, and rancour which had been hidden in his heart, in bitter envenomed reproaches against David. That prince, therefore, wisely carried his views to the over-ruling providence of God, who had permitted this for his correction, and who would not have suffered these several evils to have befallen him, or have given an opportunity to these wicked persons to treat him in so injurious a manner, if he had not deserved such heavy judgments and calamities.

On this account wicked men may be called *God's sword*, and *his hand*; as they are by the Psalmist. Indeed, if good men must be corrected, and suffer for their faults, as it is often
necessary

necessary that they should, the wicked are the readiest instruments, and need only be left to their own inclinations, and to have an opportunity given them for that purpose. In every such case, it becometh the sufferers, with David, to look beyond the immediate instruments, by whose malice, injustice, or cruelty they suffer, and to adore the hand of God, and acknowledge and submit to his righteous judgments.

It may be further observed, that evil actions are often over-ruled to the punishment of the actors themselves. The Psalmist mentions it to the glory of Divine Providence, that *the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands*. It frequently happens that those schemes and actions which bad men design to the prejudice and ruin of others, be-

become the occasion of their own. *They fall into the pit which they have digged, and in the snare which they have laid is their own foot taken.* Thus God may, and often does, make the sinner's own wickedness prove his punishment. Whilst he suffereth him to perpetrate the evil on which his heart is bent, he ordereth it so that this very thing bringeth such mischiefs upon him as serve to punish him both for that and other crimes of which he hath been guilty.

I shall conclude this discourse with obviating an objection which hath been often urged against Divine Providence, drawn from suffering so much sin and wickedness in the world. If there be a wise and righteous God, who governeth the world by his providence,

dence, why doth he not interpose to put a stop to the abounding wickedness of men? Since, if he be Almighty, he is able to do it; and if he be infinitely holy and good, he must be supposed to be willing to do it, and to promote to the utmost the happiness of all his creatures.

Now to take off the force of this objection, let it be considered, that God hath done all that was proper for him as a moral governor, to hinder men from committing sin. He hath given the most holy and excellent laws to direct them in the full extent of their duty, and hath enforced those laws by the most powerful and important sanctions. He hath in his word both made the most glorious and encouraging promises to ho-

liness and obedience, and hath declared in the strongest manner his just detestation of sin, and denounced the most awful threatenings against it, than which nothing can possibly be better fitted to deter men from indulging themselves in a course of presumptuous vice and disobedience. He hath so formed our natures, as in the most important instances to give us an inward sense of the evil of sin, so that the practice of it is followed, in minds which are not depraved and corrupted by vicious prejudices and passions, with an inward dissatisfaction and remorse; and conscience is placed within us as a witness and judge, to remonstrate against the committing of it, and to condemn it when committed.

Add

Add to this, that in the general course of God's providential dealings, there are many things which are designed to shew the evil of sin, and the pernicious consequences which attend vice. The scripture teacheth us to regard all the miseries to which the nature of man is now subject, as the effects and punishments of sin. Nay, besides the evils brought upon particular persons by their sins, there have been from time to time calamities and events of an extraordinary nature, relating to large communities, which may be looked upon as tokens of the Divine displeasure against the sins of men. Thus doth a wise and holy Providence take many ways to convince men of the evil of sin, and to excite in them an hatred and abhorrence of evil. Upon the whole it may be

said, that God hath by his laws, and in the course of his providence, done as much to encourage men to holiness and virtue, and to discourage and deter them from vice and wickedness, as is suitable to this state of trial, and becoming him as a moral governor in the present circumstances of mankind.

To which it may be added, that God in his holy providence often overruleth men's sinful actions to wise and valuable purposes. Therefore his permitting men to commit them is no just objection against his providence. It hath been shewn, that God frequently over-rules the evil actions of men for punishing their own wickedness or that of others, or for correcting and chastening his backsliding servants ;

vants; that in many instances he causes good to arise out of them, and turneth them to quite different purposes than were intended by the actors of them; and that the permission of sin giveth occasion to the exercising and bringing forth into open light, some of the noblest affections and dispositions of human nature, as also some of the divine attributes, which would not otherwise be so eminently conspicuous. Such are God's impartial justice and righteousness, the wisdom of his moral government, his patience and long-suffering towards sinners, the riches of his grace, and mercy in pardoning the truly penitent, and restoring them to his favour. Finally, it hath given occasion to all the admirable methods of our redemption and salvation by Jesus Christ, which

will lay a foundation of everlasting love, joy and praise.

To conclude then, since it appears that the sin which is actually committed in the world, is far short of what would be committed if a wise and holy providence did not interpose to prevent it; since God could not entirely hinder men from doing evil actions, without laying them under such restraints as are inconsistent with the liberty of moral agents constituted in a state of trial; since he hath done all that was proper for him as a moral governor, to dissuade and deter men from the practice of sin, and to engage them to the practice of righteousness and true holiness; and lastly, since in his most wise and sovereign providence he over-rules the sins of
men

men to answer many valuable purposes, and often brings great good out of those evils : All these considerations taken together, fully vindicate the conduct of Divine Providence in permitting men's sinful actions, and shew that in this his wisdom is to be adored, and at the same time that the purity and holiness of his nature and government is free from the least stain or blemish. A truth which, though sufficiently apparent now, would no doubt appear to us with a brighter and more convincing evidence, if we had that distinct and complete view of the Divine administration, which we hope to obtain hereafter in the kingdom of heaven.

S E R M O N VII.

Rom. xi. latter part of 33d verse.

*How unsearchable are his judgments,
and his ways past finding out?*

OUR reason sufficiently points out to us the care and providence of an all-wise Being in the administration of the affairs of the world; from the beauty, order, and regularity in all the various works of nature. To this it is owing, that the sun and moon give certain light unto us, and

that they and all the planets keep their due courses and order. Providence affords the grateful and convenient change successively of night and day, and gives the useful and necessary vicissitude of seasons to prepare the earth for its product, to bring forth and ripen all the fruits of the year.

Though our finite understanding can in these instances discern and admire the Divine wisdom, yet are there several wheels and movements in this great machine the world, several designs and ends, which are too fine for human reason to perceive, too great for limited capacities to comprehend. (That God should suffer two princes for some slight affront and fury of resentment to wage war, lay countries waste,

waste, and to make havoc of his creation, and deface the beauties of it; that the good, together with the guilty, should be involved in one common ruin and calamity of war, and that this same God, who seems unmoved at the calamities, sufferings, or death of numberless just and innocent persons, should stop the course of nature and of providence to save a single man from ruin, seems highly unaccountable and inconsistent.)

God is the common parent of mankind, and no respecter of persons; we should therefore, according to our way of reasoning conclude, that all men should share alike the interposition of Providence and the care of heaven.

Although

(Although we see that some persons are favoured with great and signal interpositions of the Divine favour, and enjoy many blessings above others; yet nevertheless (though Providence sometimes interposes in the favour of good men) we frequently find holy and righteous persons labouring under very great hardships and afflictions, pinched with poverty, and tortured by many and grievous pains, and even frequently upon account of their virtue; while the wicked and unjust man flourishes and rejoices in his wickedness and oppression.

but
& Now, that God should suffer those who faithfully serve him to labour under difficulties, and be evil intreated; and that the wicked should be suffered to reign in their iniquity; that they
should

should with impunity oppress the righteous, and even enrich themselves by it, and enjoy all the good things of this world, at the same time that he governs the world by his providence, seems hard for our reason to explain.

So that we may justly cry out with St. Paul, *Oh! the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out; for who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor?*

If, therefore, God's management of the affairs of this world, so much exceeded the understanding and comprehension of the divinely inspired St. Paul, how shall we vain, we weaker mortals, be able to attain unto such knowledge
as

as is too excellent for us ! We may, indeed, guess and make conjectures about the dispensations of Providence ; but how we are mistaken and deceived, the great variety and difference of our conjectures, and the frequent falling out of things, contrary, and beyond our firm belief and expectations, abundantly evince.

(I shall now proceed to inquire upon what accounts, and for what reasons,

and we are not able to search out God's judgments, or find out his ways? The first and chief reason, is, the vast difference there is between the Almighty Creator and his creatures. We have, indeed, capacities large and comprehensive enough to answer all the ends of our creation, if we make a right use of them : but it was never intend-

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ed that we should be able to examine into all parts of his creation and conduct.

God himself takes in all the parts of the creation in one view, and looks upon things that are not as if really in being; but how can we hope to arrive at such high and transcendant knowledge and wisdom? How can finite and limited understandings comprehend immensity, or fathom the depth, and compass the bounds of the designs of an all-wise, all-powerful, and infinite Deity?

Another reason that we cannot discern the designs of God in his providence, and reconcile his way of proceeding to our way of thinking, is, that we cannot know what ends God

proposes to himself in his administration, and therefore we can never be able to judge of the means and methods of which he makes use, since we do not know to what ends they are intended to conduce. *promote*

Again, we are not able to see into the designs of Providence, because of our failings, which makes us both unworthy and unfit to understand the secrets of the Lord. To know all that man may know of his secrets, belongs to those only who fear God; for if any man do the will of God, him shall he teach in his way. How then can the wicked expect it, who chuse not to think about God or his providence, and are not willing to believe them? (They render themselves wholly unworthy of the care of heaven, and of being

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ing instructed with the ordering of the world, and become fit to be given up to hardness of heart, and wicked and wilful ignorance; *so that seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.* Having thus considered some instances of the unsearchableness of God's judgments, and the difficulty of finding out his ways, and also given some reasons why they are so hard to be understood, I shall employ the remainder of this discourse in making some reflections upon what has been said. >

but Though we cannot discern all the proceedings of providence, yet we perceive enough of it to be ascertained, that God does regard this world, and takes notice of the actions of men. The inference that may be drawn from hence, and the use which ought to be

be made of it is, that we ought, since God considers our lives and actions, so to take care of our ways, that we may be under his constant care and protection; that we may gain, and continue in his favour, grow in virtue, increase in holiness, and be fitted and prepared for heaven hereafter. To this end we ought to be just in our dealings, charitable, benevolent, and compassionate in our conduct and behaviour towards men, pure in our actions, and pious and zealous towards God; then we may be assured that he will either protect us from, or enable us to bear up under, every calamitous circumstance of life.

Another inference to be drawn, and use to be made from the consideration of God's governing the world by such undiscernable

undiscernable methods, is, that we ought never to endeavour to pry into his secrets, for secrets belong to God. We should, therefore, carefully avoid all impatient longings after the knowledge of future events, for *sufficient to the day is the evil thereof.*

Were we ever to suppose that things to come might be discovered, yet thus to know would be much more inconvenient than not to know at all, because it would make all future misfortunes sit heavy on us, and depress our souls long before we felt the real weight of them. But above all, we should consider what a daring presumption it is, to endeavour to search out what God has determined to keep secret from us; and how vain and fruitless it is for us to imagine we can find out

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what God chuses to hide from our eyes. Let us then rest satisfied and content with what knowledge the Lord has thought fit to allow us, and let us be assured that he has given us sufficient capacities and abilities for our well-being here, and our happiness hereafter.

Again, a further use we ought to make of this unsearchableness of God's providence, is, the contentedly submitting to all his dispensations. We are very often extravagant in our wishes, and immoderate in our desires; yet, whenever things succeed not as we would have them, we are apt to murmur and repine, and think ourselves hardly treated.

But if we would but reflect, how unhappy the accomplishments of our desires

desires might make us, were all our wishes granted; if we would but seriously consider that the gracious and all-wise God can provide infinitely better for us, than we ourselves can possibly do, we should certainly be easy in whatever state God in his infinite wisdom has thought fit to place us, and be grateful for those benefits and advantages we do already enjoy, without those earnest cravings after, and uneasiness about things which God has not thought fit to bestow upon us.

Let us then, since we believe that God takes care of the world, and governs it by his providence, in all conditions, in all circumstances, and in all our actions, so behave and demean ourselves as may testify that we believe there is a good, a just, and an adorable

Providence which rules and regards mankind.

Let those who are placed above others in authority take care how they use their power; let them be impartial and just in their determinations, moderate and compassionate to their fellow-creatures, beneficial to the public, and kindly affectioned to those who are put in subjection under them.

Let them reflect that the power they exercise is not their own, and of themselves, but derived from a superior; and that to this great master they must render a full and true account of all their proceedings, who will bounteously reward them if they have diligently and dutifully performed the task which was assigned them;

them; but if they have any way misemployed the talent which God has committed to their management; if they have wantoned in their authority; if they have vaunted and prided themselves in the mischiefs they could do; if they have given way to, or delighted in oppression or wrong, they may then expect a terrible recompence for their evil actions from the abused justice of the Almighty, and his vengeance and indignation kindled up against them.

The considering what a duty and charge is incumbent on those who are put in authority, and how great a temptation and snare power may prove to those who are possessed of it, might afford a very instructive lesson to the ambitious man, not to desire too earnestly, or endeavour to acquire too anxiously,

anxiously, or not to pride himself too much if he has already obtained power, honour, and authority over others; since that on which he places his greatest happiness, may chiefly turn to his sorrow and destruction.

Let those who flourish in prosperity, and are blessed with the good things of this life, take care that they behave themselves humbly; let them watch over their conduct and behaviour, lest their heart grow insolent with prosperity, and they forget their duty and their God.

It becomes them to reflect on the uncertainty of what they now possess, and seriously to consider, that they may be furnished with wealth and temporal blessings for trial of their virtue.

Let

Let them frequently call to mind that they are but entrusted with the goods of this world, and that they are appointed as stewards and dispensers of them to their brethren when in need; and consequently that if they make the right use of them; if they supply the needy, feed the hungry, cloath the naked, and assist the necessitous, according to their abilities, they shall then receive the faithful steward's reward, and be largely recompenced in God's heavenly kingdom. But if they see the poor in want, and relieve them not; if they are unmoved at their cries and sufferings, and are guilty of oppressing them, they may then expect as a return for the bad use they made of the good things of this world, all the evils of a miserable eternity.

Let

Let then the rich and prosperous learn from such considerations as these, not to set their hearts too much upon the things of this world; let them learn to be charitable in the disposal of them, and moderate in the use of them; let them avoid all vanity and glorying in them; let them not give themselves up to luxurious and riotous living, which frequently vitiates a man's taste so far, as to make him take no pleasure in any enjoyments, but what are sensual or unlawful.

Let those who are pressed with misfortunes, and labour under adversity and poverty, comfort themselves by reflecting, that the world is governed by the providence of a just and gracious Creator, who sees fit to afflict them, either as a punishment for their
sins

fins here, that they may not be punished everlastingly hereafter, or to make trial of their virtue and patience by exposing them to affliction.

Let them consider that there is no condition of mankind exempt from difficulties, and particular trials and temptations. God sees fit to try different persons different ways; some he proves by heaping plenty of all things upon them, that he may see whether they will govern themselves with moderation, and live soberly and temperately; others again he tries, by sinking them into misfortunes, to prove whether they will behave themselves patiently and meekly under their afflictions, without repining or murmuring at the dispensations of his Providence, and submit themselves
with

with due resignation to his will and pleasure; and also that he may further try them, whether, when they are distressed with poverty, they will keep their honesty and integrity inviolate, or will give themselves up to fraud, robbery, and injustice, rather than labour under hardships.

Let us then, finally, all make ourselves content with the dispensations of Providence, as God has pleased to allot them; and though we cannot discern the design of them, let us rest satisfied that we know God is a just, a wise, a good, and merciful Being, who will not deal ungraciously, unjustly, or unmercifully with his servants. Since he does not think fit to let us know several of his secret methods of proceeding with us, since his judgments
are

are often unsearchable, and his ways
past finding out, let us not presump-
tuously desire to pry into the hidden
things of God; but let us so live that
we may deserve the care and protection
of heaven, and be fitted and enabled
to comprehend more of his judgments
and nature when we enjoy his beati-
fick presence, and are admitted to a
further manifestation of his glory and
attributes, in his everlasting kingdom.

S E R-

2nd Sunday in Advent

S E R M O N VIII.

HEBREWS xiii. part of ver. 18.

For we trust we have a good conscience.

IT is very remarkable that there is not throughout the whole Bible of the Old Testament, the word *conscience* to be found, nor is it used in the New Testament till the eighth chapter of the gospel according to St. John, when the Jews brought the woman who had been taken in adultery before our Saviour, whom they importuned to do justice upon her. He, who knew their malice was more against him than the woman, said, *He that is without sin amongst you, let him cast a stone at her; and they which heard it, being convicted*

by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest even to the last. Nor is the Greek word, which throughout the New Testament signifies Conscience, ever used in the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament (as some learned men tell us) except only in the tenth chapter of Ecclesiastes, verse the twentieth, which is thus translated, *Curse not the king, no, not in thy thought.* So that Conscience seems to be the proper and natural issue of the gospel, which introduced a stricter survey of the heart of man, and a more severe inquisition into the thoughts thereof than the law had done. He who could not be accused by sufficient witnesses to have violated the law, was thought to be innocent enough, but the gospel erected another kind of judicature, and another kind of examination, and brought men,
who

who could not be charged by the law, to be convicted by their own conscience ; and therefore St. Paul in his justification before Felix, after he had denied all that the Jews had charged him with, and affirmed that he had broken no law, added, *and herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.* His behaviour was so exact, that he did not only abstain from doing any man wrong, but from giving any man a just occasion to be offended with him.

It is a calamity never enough to be lamented, that this legitimate offspring of the gospel of peace, should by a wrong use become the occasion of more evils under the sun, than almost all other causes put together. For, as Conscience is nothing else

but the knowledge we have of what we are thinking and doing, so it can guide us no further than that knowledge reacheth. Therefore, God hath placed conscience in us to be our director, only in those actions which scripture and reason plainly tell us to be good or evil. But in cases too difficult or doubtful for us to comprehend or determine, there conscience is not concerned, because it cannot advise in what it doth not understand, nor decide where it is itself in doubt: but by God's great mercy, those difficult points are never of absolute necessity to our salvation.

There is likewise another evil to be observed; men often say, a thing is against their conscience, when really it is not conscience, but some other motive which determines them. For instance,

instance, ask any of those who differ from the worship established, why they do not come to church, they will say, they dislike the ceremonies, the prayers, the habits, and the like; and, therefore it is against their conscience; but they are mistaken, their teacher hath put those words into their mouth, for a man's conscience can go no higher, than his knowledge; and therefore till he has thoroughly examined by scripture, and the practice of the antient church, whether those points are blameable or not, his conscience cannot possibly direct him to condemn them. It is a very hard thing to assert, that any thing can proceed from the conscience of that man who is void of knowledge with respect to the subject in dispute, since there is some science necessary to be supposed, where there is a pretence to conscience.

He who obstinately refuses, upon the obligation of conscience, to do what the law under which he lives, and to which he owes subjection and obedience, requires him positively to do, ought to be sure that the doing what he is enjoined, is in itself sinful, and expressly forbidden by the word of God. Doubting in this point, is not sufficient excuse or warrant. The submitting to any present inconvenience, rather than do somewhat that is enjoined by authority to be done; the preferring reproach before honour, that will be attended with compliance to what is required of us, is no argument that such refusal is an effect of conscience; pride, ambition, revenge, or interest, will do the same. In short, conscience is made the refuge of all perverse and refractory men, when they will not observe the law,

law, and the warrant and incitement to any opposition, when they are inclined to break that law.

In order to rectify these dangerous and mistaken notions of conscience, let us first enquire what conscience is. Now, conscience is a natural restraint within us, to keep us from doing what our passions may tempt us to do; it may be too scrupulous, but it can never be presumptuous; it may hinder us from using the liberty we have, but it is too modest to lead us into excess; it is liable to fear, but never to rashness and presumption. *For this is thank-worthy, if a man for conscience towards God endure grief, suffering wrongfully,* says St. Peter. But conscience never carried a man into actions for which he is justly to suffer; that is true tenderness of conscience,

which is tender of other men's reputation, wary what they think of others, and not that which out of tenderness to itself cares not how it wrongs and violates its neighbour's peace. Conscience is the meekest, humblest thing that can be conceived; and when we find any proud thoughts to arise within us, such as exalt and magnify ourselves, and depress the reputation of our neighbour; when we have any inclination to disturb the quiet of those, who live about us, we may be as sure that those suggestions do not proceed from conscience, as that the lusts of the flesh do not proceed from the spirit. *The tree is known by the fruit, a good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit;* and conscience is best known by its effects; if the product be wrath, malice, pride, and contention, we may be

be sure that conscience is not the mother of such children, for conscience can produce nothing but peace, humility, and benevolence.

Whatever pretensions therefore men make to religion, how conscientious soever they apprehend themselves to be, or would appear to others; yet, if they do not regulate their actions by the law of God, we may, notwithstanding, say of them, that their conscience is defiled,

Now, this law of God, by which our actions are to be regulated, may be considered, either as that natural law written on the table of our hearts, for so, indeed, it can be only considered with respect to heathens, who never had the means of being instructed in the

the truths of revealed religion, or else it may be understood of the revealed will of God, discovered to us in the holy scriptures.

The wisest of men may deceive us, or be deceived themselves in their way of reasoning upon the principles and duties of religion; but the holy scriptures which were dictated by the wisdom of God, cannot (if we follow the light of them) mislead us. We have now a sure word of prophecy to direct us, both what we are to believe and do, and whose directions, if we follow, we are secure from error, and cannot do amiss.

Upon the whole matter, therefore, to have a good conscience, is to act conformably and knowingly, according
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ing to that law which God has prescribed as the rule of our actions. If, upon examining our conduct by this law, we find there is a good agreement and correspondence between them, then we may safely conclude we have done what we ought, for he has a good conscience who leads a good life. Which leads me to lay down some rules and directions in order to our obtaining such a conscience,

The first thing I would recommend to this end, is, a careful and diligent reading of the holy scriptures. For as they are the rule by which we are to be informed and directed in all our actions, as well as in matters of conscience, and from which we cannot depart, so the only way to have a conscience

science void of offence, is to consult and apply this rule to our particular cases and circumstances. But there is also this further advantage in our being much conversant in the holy scriptures, that they are not only a rule to instruct men in their duty, but a powerful means to persuade them to a conscientious discharge of that duty.

As the truths and principles of religion are only to be learned from them, so they furnish us with the best lessons of instruction, adapted to every circumstance of life, formed upon the experience of all preceding ages, and perfected by the unerring spirit of inspiration. It is there our spiritual wants are amply provided for, far better than in any compositions of mere human extraction.

Are

Are you convinced of guilt, as provoking heaven, and ruining your souls? Ask reason to point out a means of reconciliation, and a refuge of safety. She will tell you, the Deity may, perhaps, accept our supplications, and grant forgiveness. But the scriptures leave us not to this sad uncertainty of conjecture; they speak the language of clear assurance. *God has set forth a propitiation for the remission of sins that are past, so that he forgives our iniquities; he will be merciful to our unrighteousness, and our sins and our iniquities he will remember no more.*

Are you assaulted by temptation, or averse to duty? All the assistance that reason can bring, is, to shew you the deformity of vice, how inconsistent it is with the dignity of our nature, or the fitness

fitness of things. But the Bible recommends no such impotent succours. *My grace*, says its Almighty Author, *is sufficient for thee. Sin shall not have dominion over you.* The great Jehovah, in whom is everlasting strength, he worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

Are you visited with sickness, or overtaken by any fore affliction or calamity? the consolation which philosophy offers, is, that such dispensations coincide with the universal plan of divine government, and that affliction is more or less the unavoidable lot of all mankind. Another moralist tells the dejected sufferer, impatience adds to the load; whereas, a calm submission renders it more supportable. Does the word of revelation dispense
5 such

such spiritless cordials? No; those sacred pages inform us, that tribulations are fatherly chastisements, tokens of our Maker's love, and fruits of his care. That they are intended to work in us the peaceable fruits of righteousness, and to work out for us an eternal weight of glory.

Let a man, under the summons of death, have recourse to the most celebrated comforters in the heathen world; and I believe they will increase his apprehension rather than mitigate his dread. They were not able positively to determine, whether the soul survived, and never so much as dreamt of the resurrection of the body; whereas, the book of God, in a great measure, strips the tyrant of his horrors, or turns him into a messenger

senger of peace; ascertaining to the souls of the righteous, an immediate translation into the regions of bliss, and insuring to their bodies a most advantageous revival at the restoration of all things.

Thus shall we find the scriptures, if we “carefully read, mark, and inwardly digest them,” not only a rule of conscience to direct us in all circumstances but likewise a sovereign medicine to heal the maladies of life, and to subdue the fear of death, by opening to us a glorious prospect of immortality in the world to come.

Let us then have the holy scriptures frequently in our hands, and let us as frequently examine our hearts by them, *to see if there be any way of wickedness*

edness in us. Then, we cannot fail, if we do not shut our eyes against the light, or wilfully reject the motions of God's grace, *to have always a conscience, void of offence, towards God and man*; especially if we would frequently state the account between God and our consciences, and inquire what sins we have committed, and what duties we have done or omitted.

To do this more effectually, we should every morning *call our ways to remembrance*; and search the ground of our hearts, which are so apt after our strictest examination to deceive us. This is the intent of that command of the apostle, *Examine yourselves, whether you be in the faith: prove yourselves.*

So again, *Let every man prove his own works, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone.* Indeed, without taking this review of ourselves, we shall be very apt to forget what the state and condition of our souls are; what improvements we have made, and what are the present defects we labour under; and so can have no true foundation for any inward satisfaction of mind, though we may easily delude ourselves with a false apprehension of our being in a state of grace and favour with God. It is for want of calling themselves to a strict and severe account for their actions, very wicked men seem many times as secure and easy to themselves, as if their conscience was well with them, and they had nothing to dread.

But

But this I say is a false and delusive peace of mind, which will fail them when they stand in the most need of it at the hour of death, and in the day of judgment. For as the apostle argues, *If a man think himself something when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.* He imposes upon his own conscience, according to the testimony of which he ought to judge of himself here, but must certainly be judged hereafter.

If upon these views, men would seriously and frequently compare their own actions with the word of God, it would be impossible for them (except they be given up to a judicial blindness of mind, or hardness of heart) to continue any long time in a state of sin, especially in any dangerous sinful habit. Such an examination could

not fail of obliging them to quit their evil courses, and of bringing them to repentance. This was the method holy David took, and the effect it had upon him was answerable. *I thought,* says he, *on my ways, and I turned my feet unto God's testimonies;* and no doubt, if we observed the same rule, it would by the grace of God have no less effect upon us.

That therefore we may have a right notion of our spiritual state, our conscience, that we may clearly discern between good and evil, it is necessary that we behold them in that light which the scriptures afford to us.

Let us then be diligent in the reading of the holy scriptures, and glad to receive and embrace those notions of things

things which are taught us therein; for even the best disposed eye cannot rightly judge of those objects which are placed before it in the clearest light, especially should they be at a great distance, if it look upon them only with a transient glance.

It is the same with our spiritual sight; be the eye of judgment never so good, and the objects thereof never so clearly represented to us by the light of scripture, we shall yet be in great danger of mistaking them, and of passing a wrong judgment concerning them, unless we view them narrowly, and fix our mind upon them by serious meditation.

It is not enough therefore for the direction of our practice, only to learn

from scripture that we must love God and keep his commandments, to have a conscience void of offence towards God and man; nor, on the other hand, is it sufficient to make us fix our affections on heavenly objects, only to be told as we are in scripture, that *the things which are not seen are eternal*; that *in the presence of God there is fulness of joy*, and that *at his right hand there is pleasure for evermore*. But it is necessary that we consider these things seriously, that we weigh and ponder them well in our minds, that we take some time to exercise our meditations thereupon, that we wisely compare together the good and evil things of this world, with the good and evil things of the other world, and seriously consider the infinite difference there is between a moment and eternity.

Lastly.

Lastly. As *every good and perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the father of lights*, let us not forget to add our hearty prayers to God for the light of his holy spirit to instruct us, and for the assistance of his grace to understand the scriptures ;
“ Grant therefore, blessed Lord, that
“ we may in such wise hear them,
“ read, mark, learn, and inwardly
“ digest them, that by patience and
“ comfort of thy holy word, we may
“ embrace, and ever hold fast the blessed
“ hope of everlasting life, which
“ thou hast given us in our Saviour
“ Jesus Christ.” Amen.

I have been thinking of you very much lately, and
 wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are
 well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but
 I have managed to find some time to write to you.
 I have been thinking of you very much lately, and
 wondering how you are getting on. I hope you are
 well and happy. I have been very busy lately, but
 I have managed to find some time to write to you.

S E R M O N IX.

PROVERBS iii. 13.

*Happy is the man that findeth wisdom,
and the man that getteth understand-
ing.*

THE nature of man has in it a restless and uneasy desire after happiness, which is the spring that moves us to employ such means as give us a fair probability of satisfying this almost innate propensity. As our notions of happiness are very different, so are likewise the means we propose to ourselves

ourselves in order to its attainment. But how different soever our endeavours may be, it is our great misfortune scarce ever to fix upon the proper means, which is the plain reason why true satisfaction (the end we aim at) is never possessed. The mistake lies in this, the generality of mankind are strangers to themselves, and consequently deviate from the road that leads to true happiness. (We are diligent and curious enough to know other men, and it may be charitable to assist them, to inform their weakness by our instruction, and to reform their errors by our experience; and all this without giving one moment to look into our own hearts, never making an inspection into our proper failings, nor asking one of those questions of ourselves which we are ready to administer

minister to others, and thereby imagine that we have a perfect knowledge of them. We live with other men and to other men, neither with nor to ourselves. We may sometimes be left to ourselves when others are weary of us, or we are weary of being with them ; but we do not dwell at home, have no commerce, no conversation with ourselves, nay, we keep spies about us that we may not have ; and if we feel a suggestion, hear an importunate call from within, we divert it by company, or quiet it with sleep ; and when we wake, no man runs faster from an enemy than we do from ourselves.

This is not only a general disease that spreads every where, but is affected and purchased at as great a price as
most

most other of our diseases, with the expence of all our time, one moment of which we are not willing to bestow upon ourselves, though it would make the remainder of it more useful to us, and to others upon whom we prodigally consume it, without doing good to them or ourselves : whereas, if we would be conversant with our own hearts, and as ingenuous and impartial in that conversation as we pretend to be with other men, we should find we have very much of that at home by us which we take very unnecessary pains to get abroad ; that we have much of that in our own disposal which we endeavour to obtain from others, who are either not willing to gratify us, or not able to comply with our desires. The trouble and anguish, which for the most part accompany

company these disapointments, proceed merely from our not beginning with ourselves, before we repair to others.) I would not be understood as if I was endeavouring by this discourse, to inculcate such false notions of the pleasures of this world, as if they were not worthy to be considered, or could have no relish with virtuous and good men. I am verily perswaded they take very unprofitable pains, who endeavour to persuade men that they are obliged wholly to despise this world, and all that is in it, even whilst they themselves live here. God hath not formed, and furnished, and adorned this world, that they who were made by him to live in it, should despise it; it will be enough if they do not love it so immoderately, as to prefer it before him who made both it and them.

them. (Nor shall I endeavour to extend the notions of the old philosophers, and to stretch them farther by the help of christian precepts, to the extinguishing all those affections and passions, which are, and always will be, inseparable from human nature; and which it were to be wished that many christians would govern and regulate, as many of those heathen philosophers used to do.)

As long as the world lasts, and virtue and industry have reputation in the world, there will be, and there ought to be, emulation in the best and wisest men who live in it; for if it was not so, more vice and wickedness would cover every nation of the world, than those under which it now suffers. If wise and honest men quit the field,
and

and leave the world to the covetous and unjust, how savage and ignorant would it soon appear. The end therefore of this conversation with ourselves, is to get understanding; that we may be discreet in proposing reasonable designs, and then pursue them by the dictates of religion.

The not making reason our guide, is the cause why we see so many men take such pains, and disquiet themselves so much about the superfluities of life. For what is it else that covetousness, ambition, and almost every thing that the world calls business, do so eagerly pursue? Is it for food and raiment, or for a convenient wholesome dwelling only, that so many hazards are run, the minds of so many men abandoned and enslaved, the com-
mon

mon rights invaded, the public peace disturbed, and the world turned upside down? Alas! these wants are accountable but for a very small part, in comparison either of our desires, or of the mischiefs that arise from gratifying them. But pride and pomp, and all the distinctions of wealth and power, these are the views of thought and carefulness; and what condition soever falls below some of these, is thought scarce to deserve the name of living.

Now, as nature and convenience have not found these things necessary, reason and prudence cannot direct us to seek our happiness in them; much less can religion, which is reason most improved, and that best wisdom, which descended from above, recommend them.

them. These teach us to set bounds to our appetites, and to bring them within the compass of those conveniences, with which our station in life may very well be content, and God hath given us leave to ask of him. His character of Father is our security for a subsistence. But children must not prescribe to parents what measure shall be allotted them. Nay, though this father in dealing it out will always have due regard to the real uses and necessities of life; yet hath he no where engaged himself for all those ornaments, much less for all that extravagance and vanity in living, which the wantonness of desire, and the folly of custom shall call, or shall imagine to be, necessary to our happiness.

Thus, for example, an honest, industrious, good christian, may reasonably hope and believe, that God will enable him to maintain his family: but it is no article of trust in providence, that any of us shall be able to raise, or to perpetuate our family. We are reproached in the gospel for entertaining a suspicion so unworthy, as, that he, who sustains the fowls of the air, and cloaths the grass of the field, will suffer us to perish for hunger or nakedness. Thus far we may be confident. Are we therefore to suppose this gives us any title to insist upon being clothed in purple and fine linen, and faring sumptuously every day? No; this would neither be discreet nor reasonable, and consequently if we place our happiness on such irrational conjectures, we shall undoubtedly

edly be much disappointed. The true road to happiness is, to be careful to maintain good works, and then not to repine at God's dealing with us, but to be content in that station which his providence hath allotted us.

Happiness, my brethren, rest assured

To be happy does not so much consist in pomp and equipage, as in freedom from anxiety and vexation of spirit; not so much in the enjoyment of the pleasures of sense, as in peace of conscience and tranquillity of mind. To be happy, is not only to be so for a little time, but (as long as may be, and,) if it be possible, for ever. We must take reason for our guide, or rather religion, which is reason improved, and it will shew us our greatest and longest happiness. Reason aims at a freedom from the greatest evils,

and to bring us to the possession and enjoyment of the greatest good; and religion wisely considers that men have immortal spirits, which are capable of happiness distinct from that of their bodies, and because they are immortal, are capable of an everlasting happiness. Now, our souls being the best part of ourselves, and eternity being of infinitely the highest consequence, the greatest wisdom is to secure the interest of our souls and of eternity, though it be with loss, and to the prejudice of our temporal and inferior interests. Therefore, we ought to endeavour rather to secure inward peace than outward ease, to be more careful to avoid everlasting and intolerable torment, than short and light afflictions which are but for a moment. In short, our main interest

rest is to be as happy as we can, and as long as is possible. If, therefore, we be cast into such circumstances, that we must be either in part and for a time, or else wholly and always miserable, the best wisdom is to chuse the greatest and most lasting happiness, but the least and shortest misery. Upon this account reason and religion prefer that happiness which is at God's right hand for evermore, before the short and transitory pleasures of this world.

A vicious course of life is attended by an innumerable train of miseries. It darkens the intellectual faculties, transforms men into brutes, and engages them in a wearisome pursuit of pleasures, which prove inferior in possession to what they are in idea,

and instead of making their admirers happy, conclude in vanity and vexation of spirit. But religion opens such a scene of comfort, such a spring of perpetual delight, as we cannot meet with in the whole circle of sensual enjoyments. This is happiness to reflect that good men, angels, and God himself, look upon us with an eye of complacence, to find that our conduct is agreeable to right reason, and our conscience satisfied with that conduct. Such pleasure as this is not like the vain dream of a libertine; it affects the immortal part of us, and will go with us into eternal regions.

If religion was an human institution only, every wise man would cheerfully submit to its laws and rules, as an institution of the greatest wisdom, and

and most conducive to the happiness of mankind; since the grand business and prime design of it is to regulate those passions which disturb our quiet, and are pernicious, not only to private persons, but also to public societies. What pleasant companions are temperance, meekness, patience, benevolence, and a forgiving temper! How calm are the passions of one who lives under the influence of religion! How composed the mind! Has he not a paradise within him! Does he not enjoy an earnest and foretaste of heaven, where love, and joy, and delight abound!

Intellectual pleasures are infinitely preferable to those of sense, both in respect of their nature and duration. The brute is upon a level with us, or

perhaps has a quicker perception of bodily pleasures ; but in those of the mind we partake with the highest order of created beings. They are united to the immortal spirit, and rise in their worth proportionably to our improvement in virtue.

conclude
When the good christian approaches the throne of grace to confess his unworthiness and dependance ; to acknowledge the infinite wisdom, power, and goodness of the Creator, and to beseech him to shed the light of divine wisdom into his soul, what a celestial ardor does he feel ! what a spring of delight and joy ! He throws himself, without reserve, on the protection of the Almighty, is secure under the shadow of his wings, which cover him in all places, and is persuaded that he
will

will never forsake him, but conduct him through the perils of life to a state of unutterable felicity.

What a delightful labour is it to be employed in refining our nature, and making it shine forth with that brightness of which the Redeemer has made it capable. To regulate our passions, to form our manners to piety and virtue, and to be rising daily to superior excellence, is a pleasing task, a labour of which we can never repent.

Religion directs us to an innocent and inoffensive conversation, and requires us to do all the good offices in our power to all our fellow-creatures, and therefore puts us in the fairest way of living easy in the world, and of gaining the favour and esteem of our acquaint-

acquaintance. To spend our time in instructing the ignorant, comforting the distressed, feeding the hungry, cloathing the naked, is to afford light to those that sit in darkness, and life and joy to those who are ready to perish. What can give greater happiness than to supply the spiritual and bodily necessities of our brethren; to have the honour of being the happy instrument of doing much good where there is such a necessity for goodness!

To conclude; let us consider the prospects with which religion entertains us, and we shall see wherein our truest happiness consists.

Man is capable of looking back into past ages, and forward into futurity; of reflecting on the favours that have been

been conferred on him, and of anticipating happiness by considering what he shall enjoy hereafter. Religion presents this capacity in the human soul, with various objects of contemplation, which lead us into heaven, and give us an earnest of its felicities. The attributes of God, the creation of the world, the redemption of mankind, the efficacy of divine grace, the resurrection of the dead, and everlasting happiness, are topicks which cannot fail to enlighten the soul, and fill her with comfort and serenity.

To meditate on that Omnipotence which can bring water out of rocks, and pour down manna from heaven, calm the rage of the sea, and the madness of the people; stop the mouths of lions, and quench the flames of a
fiery

fiery furnace: this strengthens our faith, confirms our hope, and enables us to tread under foot every fear and uneasy apprehension.

When we consider that the Supreme Being sees the whole frame of things, and comprehends their various natures; that he knows what is best for us, and perceives the latent effect of every dispensation, we shall no longer weary ourselves with our own counsels, but throw all our cares upon him who careth for our happiness.

When we turn our thoughts to the unbounded goodness of God, who brought us into existence that we might be capable of happiness, and after disobedience had ruined us sent his own son to reinstate us in his favour,

vour, and open to us the everlasting doors; who vouchsafes us the assistance and conduct of his holy spirit, and strives by the greatest hopes, and by all the arts of kindness and love to persuade us to our interest, our hearts overflow with joy and gratitude, and acquiesce in the good pleasure of such a bountiful and gracious Being.

To look back upon a well-spent life, and to reflect that we have served our Maker, been useful in the world, and employed our time and faculties as rational creatures ought to do, will give us boldness and comfort at the approach of death. *Our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our conversation in the world.* This will, at all times, make us trust in the protection

protection of Divine Providence, the most desirable blessing, and absolutely necessary in a state of danger and vicissitude. The mind will not despond under difficulties when it is ascertained that Omnipotence is engaged in its favour. The assurance of having a Being for our protector and guardian, who can avert every real evil, and turn every accident to our benefit and advantage, will inspire us with invincible courage, and enable us to meet afflictions, or death itself, in the most formidable shape, with a serene and composed mind.

To compleat the scene, we are presented with a transporting view of eternal glory, prepared for all that obey the laws and rules of the gospel. Reflect upon such passages as these,

these, *I know that my Redeemer liveth. When this earthly tabernacle is dissolved, I have an house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous judge shall give me at that day, when the last trump shall awake me out of the sleep of death. My body shall be raised to life, in the image of the glorious body of Christ. I shall hear that comfortable sentence, pronounced by the judge in the presence of all mankind, and an innumerable company of angels: Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy lord; and then shall I, with all the righteous, enter into life eternal. Can we reflect on this, and not own that religion which opens such a glorious scene is the true path to happiness?*

pinefs? Has it not worth enough to recommend it to our choice? If we desire to be free from uneasy paffions; to perform fuch exercifes as bring rational and intellectual pleasure; to have the affurance of divine favour and protection in this life, and the prospect of eternal felicity in the next, we fhall take care to live righteoufly, godly, and foberly, and to keep always a confcience void of offence towards God and man. This, and this alone, is real folid happinefs. Defift then, oh! vain man, whoever thou art, from the purfuits of thofe enjoyments which have only the appearance of pleasure, but are in reality attended with vexation of fpirit, remorse of confcience, and every thing that is painful to thofe who make a right ufe of their reason and underftanding, and

are fully persuaded they must live for ever with fallen spirits, or with saints and angels.

If we lay these things seriously to heart, we must conclude, that to be happy is to be virtuous and good, because that is to excel many others; it is happiness to grow better, because that is to excel ourselves; nay, it is happiness to mortify and subdue our passions, because that is victory; and *happy is the man that hath this wisdom, and that getteth this understanding,*

are folly persuaded they must live for
ever with fallen spirits, or with devils
and angels.

If we lay these things seriously to
heart, we must conclude, that to be
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...and that giveth his understanding.
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...and that giveth his understanding.

S E R M O N X.

HEBREWS viii. 7.

For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

THE author of this epistle finding the persons to whom he wrote, relapsing from the christian to the jewish dispensation, shews by many and unanswerable arguments, taken from the nature, design, and end of this institution, that it was only calculated for one particular nation, and at a certain

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period

period of time was to cease, and make room for the ushering in of another, far more excellent and glorious, better adapted to promote true and real goodness, and the eternal happiness of mankind. God, says the holy penman, at the beginning of the first chapter, *who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his son.* For having created man for noble purposes, to love, serve, and obey his Maker, he was careful in all ages, by the various manifestations of his will, to acquaint him with his duty, and to shew him what was good, and what the Lord required of him.

In order hereunto, besides the law of nature, God was pleased to superadd

that of revelation, making gradual discoveries of himself and his will, which still in every age and period of the church, shone with a brighter and more glorious lustre, the nearer the Sun of Righteousness was to his rising. *appearance*
But yet this dispensation proving ineffectual to make the comers thereunto perfect, consisting only of meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed upon them until the times of reformation, and, in its own nature, incapable of being extended to the remoter parts of the world, what can be more reasonable to believe concerning God, than that *He*, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all his works; who hath made of one blood the whole nation and common-wealth of mankind, and is the God not of the

Jews but of the Gentiles also (as St. Paul excellently argues in his epistle to the Romans) I say, what can be more reasonable to believe, than that he should some time or other, make such a general revelation of his will to mankind, as should in all times and places be a perfect and compleat rule of duty, extending to, and obliging all, and which should never stand in need of addition, amendment, or alteration.

Now, the jewish religion (which, in the words of the text, is stiled the first covenant) though it had considerable advantages above the light of nature, and was the only law God had then given, yet was very weak and ineffectual to the great end of righteousness and true holiness, and to raise man to
that

that perfection of goodness, of which human nature, through the grace of God, is capable. Nay, so extremely short did it fall of this degree of perfection, that the apostle, at the seventh chapter, eighteenth and nineteenth verses, chargeth it with weakness and unprofitableness: *For there is verily, says he, a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, for the law made nothing perfect*; that is, in degree and comparison to what was possible, and in some respects needful.

If we consider its ceremonies, we shall find no real or intrinsic goodness in them, to commend them to our practice; if we examine its promises of spiritual and eternal blessings, which are the strongest motives to obedience, we shall find it very imperfect

fect and deficient in them; if we regard its ability to procure an absolution as to conscience, and deliverance from death, we shall find that it could not purchase pardon for any who had broken it, nor make the worshippers of God perfect, as pertaining to conscience.

From these, and other imperfections of that dispensation, the apostle urges the necessity of disannulling it, and bringing in a more perfect institution, which should supply all the defects and weaknesses of that first covenant, and really and truly effect all which the jewish religion attempted, but could not thoroughly accomplish. *For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.*

From

From these words, I shall

First. Shew the advantages and excellence of the christian religion above that of the Jews.

Secondly. By way of inference, I shall examine what effect it ought to have upon our lives and conversation, from its advantages and excellence.

1st. I am to shew the advantages and excellence of the christian religion above the Mosaic law.

Now, the pre-eminence of the gospel dispensation above the jewish œconomy, appears in this, that the Mosaic dispensation was almost wholly made up of types and shadows, whereas the gospel dispensation has brought in the

the truth and substance. The jewish ordinances were but shadows of good things to come, sensible representations of what was to follow after. Their ceremonies were figures of those things that are true; their land of Canaan typified heaven. Moses and Joshua were types of Jesus Christ, and the Israelites after the flesh, of the true Israel after the spirit. All their expiatory sacrifices did but represent that great sacrifice, whereby Christ offered up himself, and by his own blood purged away the sins of mankind. Indeed, the most minute and inconsiderable circumstances of the jewish œconomy were intended as little lights, that might gradually usher in the greater light of the gospel.

Again;

Again ; The pre-eminence of the christian religion above the jewish dispensation appears in this, that we are redeemed from those many and burthensome impositions, wherewith they were clogged, and are now obliged only to a more easy and rational service. The law was a very grievous and servile dispensation, consisting of carnal ordinances, costly duties, splendid sacrifices, and innumerable rites and ceremonies. Its professors were bound to undergo the painful ceremony of circumcision ; to abstain from many sorts of food ; to keep multitudes of solemn and stated times ; new moons and ceremonial sabbaths ; to make long and tedious journies to Jerusalem ; to offer their sacrifices at the temple ; to observe daily washings and purifications ; to use infinite care
and

and caution in every place; for if they did but touch an unclean thing, besides their present confinement, it put them to the expence of a sacrifice, and some troublesome and costly services were required of them. Severe, indeed, was its bondage, heavy were its burthens; so severe and heavy, that under the weight of them, good men in all ages did groan, and earnestly breathed after the times of reformation; nay, the apostles themselves assure us, it was a yoke which neither they nor their fathers were able to bear.

But this yoke is taken off from our shoulders; this burthen is removed from us, and a way opened into the liberty of the children of God. The law treated mankind like children in
their

their minority. We are freed from the rod and lash of its tutorage, and are no more subject to the severities of its command. All these severities our Lord has removed, freed us from that servile and troublesome way of worship, and brought in a more manly, and more rational religion, more suitable to the perfections of God, more accommodated to the reason and understanding of men. A religion incomparably the wisest and best that ever took place in the world, as wholly tending to advance real and substantial goodness, to reform the minds and manners of men, and make us like that holy and perfect Being, in whose service we are thus engaged. The religion of the Jews was not therefore established because good and excellent in itself, but for its suitability

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ness to the temper of that people for whom it was designed. Happy we, whom the gospel has freed from those slavish and intolerable observances to which they were obliged, and has taught to serve our Maker in a way far better, more acceptable, more humane, more natural, and in which we have larger measures of divine assistance afforded us, than were ever given to the Jews under their dispensation. All these conspire to render our way smooth, plain, and easy, altogether free from those hindrances, which were the natural and constant concomitants of the Mosaical institution. Our burthen is now easy, and our yoke is light, as our Lord himself tells us, *Take my yoke upon you, for my yoke is easy, and my burthen is light.*

Further

Further still, the pre-eminence of the christian religion above the Mosaic institution appears in this, that the dispensation of the gospel is founded upon more noble and excellent promises (or as it is expressed in the words immediately preceding the text, *a better covenant established upon better promises*). The law, strictly considered, as a particular covenant which God made with the Jews, had no spiritual blessings annexed to it. Plenty, prosperity, and happiness in this life, were the only promises which it expressly held forth. I do not say, but that under the Old Testament there were promises of spiritual things, and of eternal happiness. But these, though they were under the law, yet were they not of the law: nor these blessings by the Levitical priesthood, but
by

by the prophecies and promises of a future Saviour. On the contrary, under the christian œconomy, the promises are evidently more clear and spiritual. Not a temporal Canaan, external prosperity, or pardon of ceremonial uncleannesses, but remission of sins, reconciliation with God, and everlasting life, are plainly and clearly proposed and offered to us.

Neither Jew nor Gentile had any fixed expectation of a future state, and the law of Moses did not enlarge its prospect beyond the bounds of a temporal and earthly felicity; while whatever spiritual blessings were proposed to the Jews, were obscure and dark, and very few of the people understood them. But our Blessed Saviour has put the case beyond all peradventure,
and

and by the resurrection of himself, and ascension into the highest heavens, has given us the pledge and assurance of a future immortality. The veil is now taken off, *and life and immortality brought to light by the gospel*, inasmuch as he has given us the clearest account concerning the state of another life. For now we have sufficiently revealed the invisible things of another world, and are plainly told what that heaven is, which is promised to good men; a state of spiritual joys; of rational delights; a conformity of ours to the divine nature; a being made like to God; and an endless and uninterrupted communion with him.

4thly. The pre-eminence of the christian above the jewish institution

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appears

appears in this, that the covenant of the law had not those spiritual promises contained in it of the grace and assistance of the holy spirit, which are revealed in the gospel.

Great and heavy were the commands which the law laid upon the Jews; and, at the same time, it left them destitute of those many and great advantages of inward assistance, which were wholly necessary to the fulfilling of them. They were altogether devoid of those powerful aids, which are requisite for us in our present state. *It could do nothing*, says the apostle, *in that it was weak through the flesh*, and by reason of the weakness and unprofitableness thereof, it could make nothing perfect. This circumstance alone made it a heavy yoke; since what was en-
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joined was so difficult and troublesome, and the assistances it gave so small, and inconsiderable. Because of this great defect, the law is said to be a state of bondage and servitude; and on the contrary, the gospel, by reason of this mighty advantage, is called a state of adoption and liberty. For the gospel dispensation does not only prescribe such laws as are most accommodated to the true temper of human nature, adapted to the reason of mankind, and such as prudence itself would have chalked out, upon account of their essential and intrinsic goodness, but it affords such plentiful assistances of the divine spirit, that thereby our vitiated faculties are repaired, and we enabled (though encompassed with such weakness, and beset by so many temptations) to hold

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on in the paths of virtue and religion, and run with patience the race that is set before us. Upon this the apostle lays great stress, as a main difference between these two covenants, namely, that the first gave an external law; but the new covenant offers inward grace and assistance to enable men to obedience, and hath an inward and powerful efficacy upon their minds accompanying its ministration.

5thly. The last advantage which I shall mention of this doctrine, is this, that it is of universal extent, both with respect to place and time.

That the jewish religion was not intended to instruct and oblige all mankind, the whole frame and tenor thereof evidently sets forth, being particularly

ticularly adapted to that nation, and confined within the narrow limits of Judea. “In Judah only was God known, and his name was great in Israel. He shewed his words unto Jacob, and his statutes and judgments unto Israel; but he did not deal so with any other nation, neither had the heathen knowledge of his laws.”—In those times the knowledge of God was confined principally to the Jews; God suffering other nations to walk in their own ways, the ways of superstition and idolatry; *being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel; strangers to the covenant of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world;* and therefore particularly described under this character, *the Gentiles which knew not God.*

But the gospel has a much wider sphere to act in, as vast and extensive

S E R M O N X.

as the world itself. Our Lord gave commission to his disciples to go into all nations, and preach the glad tidings of peace to every creature. Accordingly *their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*; by which means the grace of God, that brings salvation, appeared unto all men, and the gospel was, or will be in due time, preached unto all nations under heaven; so that now, as the apostle expresses himself, *there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, but we are all one in Christ Jesus; and in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.*

Nor is it of less universal latitude and extent with respect to time. The jewish dispensation was only temporary, to continue for a certain term of
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years, and then cease; whereas the gospel was to be *an everlasting covenant*, and continue to the end of the world. The coming of the Messiah was to put an end to the former covenant, and the evangelical state consequent upon it, was to equal the age and duration of the world, as being the last dispensation that God would make to mankind. *God*, says the author to the Hebrews, *who at sundry times, and in divers manners, spake in time past by the prophets unto the fathers, both in these last days spoken unto us by his Son.* The same apostle also says, *Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven.* From which words he argues the abolishing the jewish dispensation, and bringing in another that should be unalterable.

Having thus shewn how the christian religion excels the Mosaic dispensation, and supplies all those defects, weakneses, and imperfections, which were found in that institution; or as the prophet Daniel expresses it, *hath brought in everlasting righteousness*, that is, hath confirmed those laws of holiness and righteousness, which were of indispenfible and eternal obligation; I proceed by way of application, to shew the influence it ought to have upon our lives and actions, from its manifest advantages and excellencies.

Now, if it be the design of our Saviour's coming into the world, and the christian dispensation be every way fitted and adapted, to advance real and substantial holiness, to reform the
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minds and manners of men, and make them as excellently good as this imperfect state of mortality is capable of; and in order hereunto hath freed us from many laws, heavy and troublesome, but no way tending to promote that which was really and truly good, and brought in a more manly and rational way of worship, affording larger assistances towards the performance of our duty, and stronger motives to engage us to persevere and continue in it, not temporal and transitory, but spiritual and permanent, such as will every way gratify the desires of our souls, and extend to the full satisfaction of every power and faculty of them; I say, if this be effected by the christian institution, what a reproach and shame will it be to us, who have the happiness to be under
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the power and influence of this institution, if the temper of our mind, and tenor of our conversation, be not in some measure answerable to its excellence? Is it not a very unsuitable way of commemorating the benefits of the gospel dispensation, that iniquity should now more abound, and that our love of God, and zeal for his service, should now be most cold, when it ought to be most active and sincere?

The proper return, surely, is to be more fervent and ardent in our supplications and prayers; and we have no excuse now, if our conversation be not such as becometh the gospel of Christ. If our Lord had added to the ceremonial precepts, ought not we to have complied with them? How much

much more then, when having *blotted out the hand-writing of ordinances that was against us*, he has enjoined only a more spiritual and reasonable service. We are not now engaged to the service of those rituals, which were commanded the Jews ; but, being freed from them, have more time and leifure for performing the more substantial parts of religion, which, if we do not, now we have this opportunity, greater and heavier will be our punishment. The greater helps and advantages we have of being good, the greater things may be justly expected from us, and larger returns of duty required at our hands. If a Jew, moved only by the promise of temporal rewards, could be wrought upon, as much as in him lay, to live up to the terms of that rigorous dispensation ;

penſation; how much more ought we chriſtians, whoſe promiſes are greater, and rewards more excellent, to be hereby incited to a diligent performance of that condition, which is required of us in order to ſalvation.

Let us, then, *who name the name of Chriſt*, and profeſs ourſelves to be his diſciples, *depart from all iniquity*. Let us ſee well, *if there be any way of wickedneſs in us*, and by a ſpeedy and true repentance return unto God. Let us ſo employ our time, a great part of which the Jews were obliged to ſpend in their ceremonial performances, which profited nothing, and availed not to make the comers thereunto perfect; let us ſo employ our time, that it may tend to the improvement of the inner
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man, to the making ourselves wiser
and better, knowing, that *we cannot*
now escape if we neglect so great a
salvation.

END OF VOL. I.

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